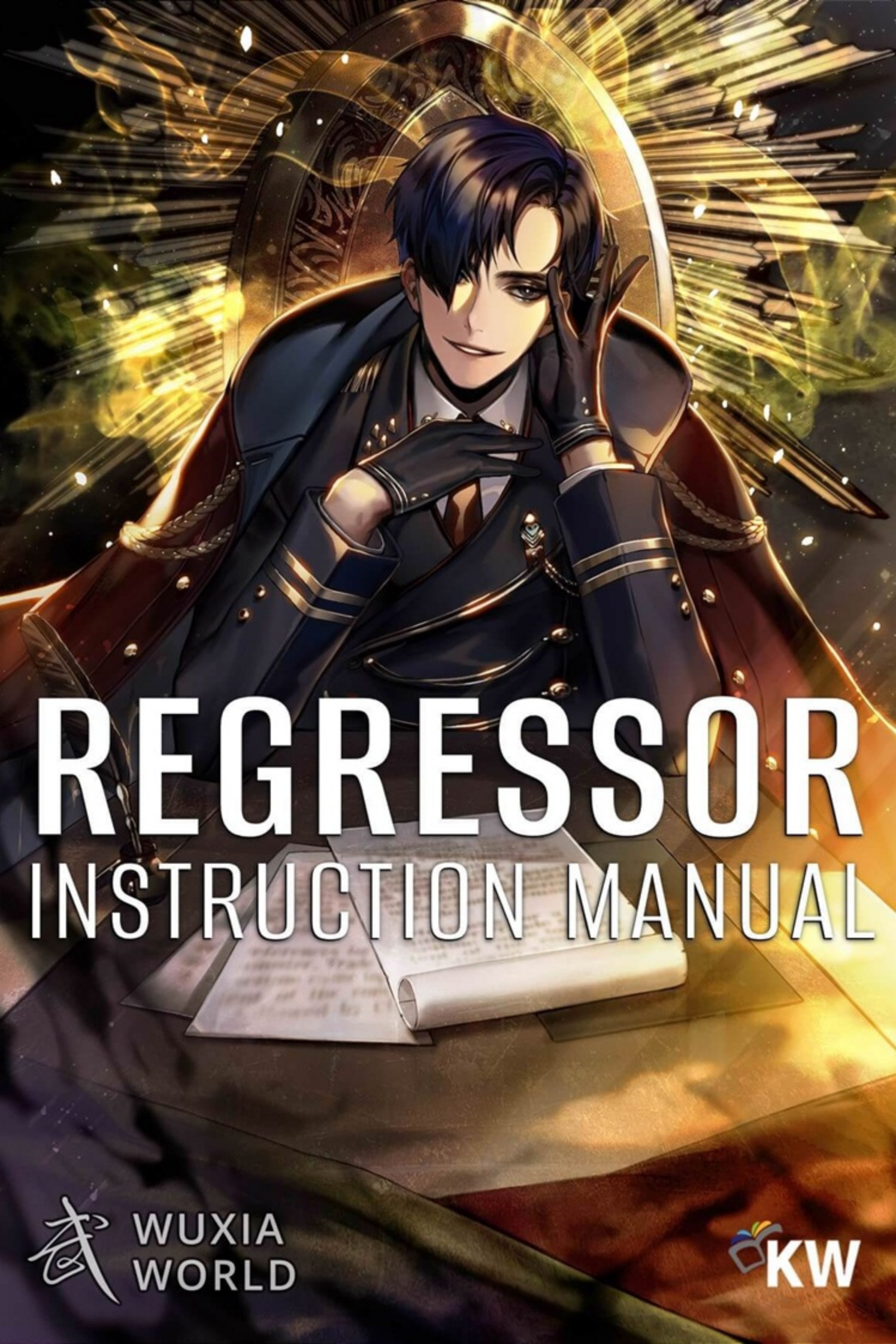
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
KW

REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

– 회귀자 사용설명서 –

- VOLUME 4 -

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[WUXIAWORLD]

CHAPTER 151
LADY MARILYN (1)

I just wanted to rest while traveling.

'Hoo... '

I was physically comfortable, but the problem was that I had a lot to think about. I wasn't sure why Mind Eye's rank suddenly increased, but I did have an idea. Although it was only an assumption, I think it was because of Kim Hyun-Sung.

'Status window... '

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young's Status Window and Stats.]

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - Mercenary Queen's Lover, Benigoa Holy Empire's Honorary Bishop]

[Age - 25]

[Nature - Cautious Strategist]

[Job - Bioalchemist - Unique Epic Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired special summoning knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 21/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 22/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 30/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 72/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 22/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 60/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 33/Below average growth limit]

[Gear]

[Juliena, the Cursed Sword - Legendary Rank - Senses Owner]

[Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy - Epic Rank - Alchemist Exclusive]

[Magic Shield Ring - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - Mind's Eye - Legendary Rank]

[Overall Review - You've grown enough where you can save people. Your somewhat high intelligence and luck are impressive. Your other stats are so trash that I won't bother mentioning them, but the fact that your magic stat is over 30 points is worthy of praise. Naturally, your epic-ranked job and legendary-ranked item stand out the most. There's a limit, but keep trying your best. I'll cheer you on quietly.]

'It became a little friendly.'

It could be just my misunderstanding, but I feel like the overall review had become a bit friendlier. Unlike the first time when it told me not to do anything and just die, it felt like the system was cheering me on. Of course, I didn't know how exactly this system worked, but when I pledged my loyalty to Kim Hyun-Sung, I thought it was then that Mind's Eye's rank increased.

'At least that's what happened when I did it… '

It could be a coincidence, but when considering the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung was a regressor, it didn't feel like a coincidence. One couldn't go back in time just because they wanted to and one of Kim Hyun-Sung's titles was Regressor or Altanus. I thought that maybe he had gotten help from someone while traveling back in time. A supernatural being? A transcendental being? It could even be god. It could also be the bastard that created this system, gave powers to ordinary humans, and was watching over us. Only someone with that much power could help him time travel…

'The problem was… '

Why did they pick Kim Hyun-Sung? The answer was simple, though. There was something they wanted and even though I didn't know what they wanted, I was certain that our regressor was loved by the transcendental being. I thought that maybe my attribute rank increase was a gift from his existence. It was like Kim Hyun-Sung was telling me that I had done well and that I must continue helping him.

[Attribute]

[Mind's Eye - Legendary Rank]

[You can view yours and others' status window and hidden potential rank. It may be a legendary-ranked attribute, but the majority of its features are locked due to an unknown force.]

[Extra - You can view yours and others' unique habits. A unique habit is a type of stat the player can't see and can only be seen by Lee Ki-Young who possesses the legendary-ranked Mind's Eye.]

The description said the majority of Mind's Eye's features were locked due to an unknown force. I thought the features were going to unlock one by one if I worked harder. Of course, this was just an assumption, but it wouldn't really matter even if I said, "Of course! I'll always be loyal! Thank you! God!" The important thing was that I had obtained a new skill. I thought about the difference between a unique habit and an attribute and why I needed to see it, but I realized that it was more useful than I thought. An attribute was a power given to the player by the system, but a unique habit was a power each person possessed based on their personality. The majority of attributes possessed positive effects, but that wasn't the case for unique habits. It

could have a very negative effect.

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young's Unique Habit.]

[The Temptation of a Liar]

[You seduce the other person and make them listen to you. Increases the chance of being loved by a dangerous member of the opposite sex.]

Something like mine for example and there was this too…

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan's Unique Habit.]

[Love Overflowing with Blood]

[You lay down everything for the person you love. Even your life and conscience. Increases the chance of awakening in certain situations that involves the target of your love. Beware of side effects.]

Basically, it made it easier for me to handle the people around me, and even though I didn't know how much this unique habit affected a person, I had an idea just by looking at Jung Ha-Yan's unique habit and mine. It was pretty spot on. The fact that Jung Ha-Yan could release an immense amount of power when I was involved and the fact that I kept getting tangled in strange relationships could be categorized as a skill. I was a bit mentally exhausted since I kept analyzing my new skill and it was natural for me to feel this way because I wasn't going to rest without thinking or doing anything.

'It's still good though… '

Naturally, I thought about how I could know everything about a person once all of Mind Eye's features were unlocked. It could even have the ability to read their minds, which would allow me to obtain almost all information.

'Benigoa goddess! Altanus! I'll be forever loyal to our regressor! You can give me more!

Please give me more!'

I yelled in my mind, but nothing happened and I heard Jung Ha-Yan's voice instead of the goddess' voice. Jung Ha-Yan started talking as she looked at me. "Oppa, you look tired."

"It's probably because I haven't been able to sleep well recently… I'm a bit tired. How long until we reach Castle Rock?" I asked.

"I heard that we still have a way to go. Actually… we're almost there," she answered.

"That's a relief…"

"O-Oppa," she called.

"Yeah?"

"*Um…* Castle Rock… is where Lady Marilyn is, right?" she asked.

"*Oh…* yeah," I answered.

"I heard from someone… that… men like caucasian women…" she said in a low voice.

'Park Deok-Gu, that bastard… '

For some reason, I had a feeling it was Park Deok-Gu who said that. She had a few days to herself and I guess something must have been bothering her. I wasn't sure why Jung Ha-Yan was wary of Lady Marilyn, but there was one reason I could think of.

'Did she… read the letter?'

Thinking about it now, I left Jung Ha-Yan in my room after reading the letter and if she had read Lady Marilyn's letter, then it would lead to an unnecessary misunderstanding. To make things worse, if she visited Park Deok-Gu to consult with him and he said something strange, then it would make the situation even worse. I was already having a headache and I wasn't exactly happy about Jung Ha-Yan making a fuss.

'That pig's really… '

I guess he still wanted to use the boat in the room. It was important to reassure her from the start. Since Kim Hyun-Sung must've felt that Jo Hye-Jin would be very useful, I had no choice but to talk while patting Jung Ha-Yan.

"Lady Marilyn and I have nothing going on, so you don't have to worry."

"*Oh!*"

Jung Ha-Yan didn't cause as much trouble anymore after we returned from the Cursed Shrine, but she was still Jung Ha-Yan, so I had to constantly manage her mentality. I knew I had to keep doing this even without knowing her unique habit.

"Hyung-nim! Come outside. You too, noonim!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"*Huh?*"

"I think we're almost at Castle Rock. *Wow…"* he commented.

"Okay…"

After heading outside while holding Jung Ha-Yan's hand, I saw a large fortress built out of rocks.

"*Wow…"*

"Don't you think it's ridiculous?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I think you mean it's quite the scenery," I said, correcting him.

It definitely was a sight to behold. The fortress had hard, solid walls and the tall walls looked like they wouldn't break no matter what attacked them. It was a bit annoying that we couldn't see inside because of the tall walls, but this scene alone already pleased me. If Lindel was slowly becoming modernized and the Holy Empire capital was extremely flashy, then the fortress in front of me was the same fortress I imagined would be in a fantasy world. I was so shocked that my mouth unknowingly went agape.

"It's amazing," I commented.

"So you feel the same way," Kim Hyun-Sung said with a smile.

“Oh, Mr. Hyun-Sung,”

“I’ve heard stories about this place, but in the past, Castle Rock was the most strategically important area in all of Benigoa,” he explained.

“*Hmm…*”

“The tall walls were designed to stop the monsters, but it ended up stopping the Republic from invading. Naturally, the monsters stopped appearing in the area, but the citizens of Castle Rock are proud of their walls,” he added.

“It’s understandable since they’re close to the border and there’s a large forest next to them… *Oh!* Does that mean the forest nearby has been strange recently?” I asked.

“Yes. We’ll have to check the details, but I heard the survival rate of the mercenaries and free citizens living in Castle Rock has been going down and they sometimes see monsters coming out from the forest. I’m not sure what’s going on, but it’s not a good sign,” Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

‘I’m sure you know what’s going on, though… ’

It was funny how he said that when he requested that we bring *all these* supplies.

‘How cute… ’

Even while patting Jung Ha-Ya’s head, the carriage continued to head toward Castle Rock and the closer we got, the taller the walls became. All of a sudden, I saw a familiar figure.

‘Oh… ’

Lady Marilyn came to see me with numerous knights behind her. Despite the fact that I hadn't decided when I was going to visit her, she came to see me on her own and it worried me a lot. After all, I didn’t want to put Jung Ha-Yan in a bad mood.

Kim Hyun-Sung quietly glanced at us and it was as if he was asking me whether they came out here to greet us. I wanted to prove my competency to our regressor, but I also wanted to take care of Jung Ha-Yan’s mental health at the same time. If I picked one, then I would have to give up the other, but the answer was already there…

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young!” Lady Marilyn called out.

I saw her running toward me while crying.

‘Shit… Ha-Yan, this isn’t what you think.’

I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung and spoke loud enough that Jung Ha-Yan could hear me.

“I never said I was going to visit… she must’ve seen us coming from afar.”

“I see,” Kim Hyun-Sung said, nodding.

“*Ahem*. I think it would be best to introduce everyone.” I suggested.

“Sure…”

Naturally, I waved toward her after getting off the carriage.

“*Oh!* Lady Marilyn!”

I was going to shake her hand, but she kept running toward me without slowing down.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young!” She called out.

I panicked when she hugged me as if we were a long-distance couple who hadn’t met each other for a long time. I was trying to decide whether to push her away or just let her be while her knights observed us from the side.

‘Sigh… ’

Jung Ha-Yan bit her lips. Jo Hye-Jin and Kim Hyun-Sung looked surprised. Even Kim Ye-Ri’s voice sounded loud even though it had been a long time since I heard her speak.

“Cheater.”

CHAPTER 152
LADY MARILYN (2)

I felt like I got caught, but this situation was more important than what Kim Ye-Ri had just said. Lady Marilyn was the issue because she was acting as if we were a long-distance couple who hadn't seen each other for a long time. I gently pulled her away since she was still hugging me and I immediately heard her talking after I spoke.

"It's nice to see you again, Lady Marilyn."

"Me too, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

"I didn't think you'd come out here to greet me," I said.

"A-After I received your letter that you would visit someday, I've been waiting for you to come," she said, stuttering.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

It took about 15 days for a letter to arrive here from Lindel, so I felt a bit flustered when she said that she had been waiting for me.

'She's kind of strange too… '

[Checking Imperial Citizen Marilyn Castlerock's Unique Habit.]

[Obsessive Girl]

[She becomes wildly obsessed with things she's interested in.]

'Shit… '

It would be best to keep my distance for the time being. Marilyn Castlerock's nature was an innocent noblewoman and at the time, I thought it wouldn't be a big issue if I got closer to her, but after looking at the details, I noticed something a bit different. I didn't know exactly what it was, but I was certain she wasn't normal and since being the daughter of Castle Rock's lord was her only strength, it was best to keep my distance from her.

'Things could get complicated… '

I didn't want to create another Jung Ha-Yan.

"I had always been waiting to hear news from Lindel in the tall castle. I knew you would come to visit one day," Lady Marilyn said.

"I see…"

"I even receive newsletters from Lindel and read them," she added.

"*Oh…* I see…"

'…'

"You have no idea how happy I was to see a carriage coming from afar this morning. *Oh!* I haven't introduced myself to the others. Hello, visitors of Castle Rock. I'm Marilyn Castlerock of Castle Rock, but you can call me Marilyn," she said, introducing herself.

"It's nice to meet you, Lady Marilyn."

"This is Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung and he's the Blue Guild's guild master. Feel free to greet the other members. You've met Miss Ha-Yan before, am I right Lady Marilyn?" I asked.

"Yes, it's nice to see you again, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. I've heard a lot about you too, guild master," she said to Kim Hyun-Sung after greeting Jung Ha-Yan.

"I've heard about you as well, Lady Marilyn. It'll be short, but we'll be in your care while we're here," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'That's bullshit… Don't say you've heard about someone even if you're trying to be

polite.'

It was true that I talked about Kim Hyun-Sung back when I was at the castle, but I had never talked about Lady Marilyn to him. I thought it wasn't a good idea to tell someone that you heard about them. Meanwhile, Jung Ha-Yan didn't look so good so I thought about giving her an excuse, but I heard someone's voice. They must've run over because they were trying to catch their breath when they arrived.

"*Hoo… hoo…* Honorary bishop, Lee Ki-Young!"

"Father Judas! So you were at the Castle Rock shrine," I said with a smile.

I met him at the Vatican as well and even though we only drank tea together, my family at the Vatican was rather tight-knit.

"I would've come to greet you if you notified me ahead of time. *Hahaha*," he said while boisterously laughing.

"*Hahaha*. I can't make you wait when I know you're busy. I would've brought a gift if I knew you were coming, Father Judas. I never imagined you would be at Castle Rock," I told him.

"*Haha*. I guess I haven't told you. A gift… *ahem*. It's the thought that matters, he said.

"How is Father Basel doing?" I asked.

"*Haha.* He's the same as always. He has been busy serving the Benigoa goddess…" he replied.

"I see. Mr. Hyun-Sung, could you come here… I've told you before, right? This is Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung and he's the guild master of the Blue Guild. This is Miss Sun Hee-Young; she's the guild's priestess and she does so much volunteering work that she's known as the saint of the slums. She's one of the few priestesses that preaches the goddess's will in Lindel," I introduced the others.

"*Oooh,* so you're the guild master I've heard about. And you're the priestess, Sun Hee-Young…" he repeated.

"Yes."

“I’ve heard a lot about you, Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung. I’ve been told many times that you’re fair, righteous, and powerful. I can see why Brother Lee Ki-Young complimented you so much. You have such a deep gaze,” Father Judas remarked.

“I’m flattered, Father Judas. My name is Kim Hyun-Sung and I’m the guild master of the Blue Guild,” Kim Hyun-Sung said, introducing himself once more.

“Sister Victoria! Come here and meet priestess Sun Hee-Young!” he yelled.

“Yes, Father Judas,” Victoria answered.

“Having a priestess like you among the free city citizens is truly a blessing,” Father Judas complimented.

“*Hahahaha.*”

Because of the introduction and the loud atmosphere, I was able to pull Marilyn away. The people who knew Jung Ha-Yan rushed over and greeted her, but Jung Ha-Yan didn’t seem all that interested in them. It seemed like all she wanted to do was stay next to me.

Kim Hyun-Sung was the busiest out of all of us and he seemed flustered because of all the people suddenly greeting him. You could connect with them and make more connections through them. Creating a positive image of Kim Hyun-Sung in the castle and the Vatican was all I had to do.

‘This is what your hyung can do… ’

It wasn’t much, but it was still considered a skill and even though the original party members weren’t confused by it, Jo Hye-Jin seemed like she didn’t know what to do.

‘It’s understandable… ’

The Blue Guild had a lot of potential because we managed to form an alliance with the Red Mercenary Guild, the Black Swan Guild, and the Yozora Guild. We even managed to monopolize the potion market. However, the Blue Guild was still considered a mid-sized guild. Even though we were financially stable, power was the most important thing here and we couldn’t really do much about that. Even so, we were receiving this kind of treatment, so it was understandable for Jo Hye-Jin to be surprised. Even if Cha Hee-Ra and Kasugano Yuno came here together, the

archbishop wouldn't come out and greet them like this. It was natural for her to respond that way since the key figures within the city had come outside just to greet us upon our arrival.

'Hye-Jin, behave yourself.'

"We should go inside; it's not good to keep standing outside." Lady Marilyn suggested.

"*Hahaha*. Yes, let's do that, Lady Marilyn. This old man wasted your time because I was happy that Brother Lee Ki-Young was visiting," Father Judas said.

"That's not true. I'm glad you welcomed me like this, Father Judas," I told him.

"You're still the sweet talker I remember, Brother Lee Ki-Young. *Haha*. Please hurry inside. You can rest at the lord's castle and make sure to visit the shrine," he said.

"Of course, Father Judas…"

"I'm sure the followers will be happy, *haha*," he laughed once more.

The knights made a path and we slowly headed toward the city. The large gate opened and we saw Castle Rock from the inside. Even though the percentage of imperial citizens was higher here, the free city citizens settled down in the majority of the areas so there were many Asians with black hair.

"You have no idea how surprised I was that you suddenly visited Castle Rock, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Lady Marilyn commented.

"I didn't think we'd meet again so soon, Lady Marilyn. Don't you agree, Ha-Yan?" I asked.

"I agree, Oppa!" she answered in a rather enthusiastic way.

"*Oh…*"

I guess Jung Ha-Yan started to feel better when I took care of her because she was smiling. Meanwhile, Marilyn looked discouraged. Kim Hyun-Sung was stuck talking to Father Judas and the remaining party members were looking around Castle Rock with interest. However, the players that lived in Castle Rock were more interesting

than our party members. I couldn't help but smile when I saw that the other players had the same expression Jo Hye-Jin had earlier.

"*Pffft!*"

It was obvious what they were thinking. They were curious about who we were because not only were we accompanied by the knights, but even the archbishop of the shrine was with us. I was sure this was unusual for them as well and when they looked over here thinking that a special guest had arrived, I couldn't help but pity them.

'Tsk.'

The people must've thought we were free city citizens just like them because their surprise only lasted for a moment and the closer we got to the castle, the more people started looking at us.

'Jo Hye-Jin.'

From the citizens' point of view, she had no choice but to leave Castle Rock, but she suddenly returned home in glory. Jo Hye-Jin must be pretty burdened by their gazes because she didn't look around, but it was obvious that she was wary of Castle Rock's citizens. She was also worried that someone might recognize her and I was certain that she left on bad terms. I wasn't sure why she seemed like a criminal when she only did the right thing, but seeing her pretending to be okay was amusing.

"Lady Marilyn."

"Yes, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

"You remember Miss Jo Hye-Jin, right? I told you about her last time…" I said.

"*Ohh!* I see. I've heard a lot about you from my father, Miss Hye-Jin," Marilyn said.

"I see…"

"I was at the academy a few years ago so I wasn't able to see you, but I heard you lived in Castle Rock and did something impressive…" she said.

"It… wasn't that impressive. I just did what other free citizens would've done…" Jo

Hye-Jin said.

“It’s all thanks to people like you and Mr. Lee Ki-Young that the Holy Empire is progressing. I want to thank both of you on behalf of the imperial citizens,” she complimented.

Jo Hye-Jin must’ve felt like all eyes were on her when Marilyn kept talking to her because she was known as the precious child of Castle Rock. The situation was getting more fun and out of them, a few people caught my attention. There were people who clicked their tongues or frowned and the guild badge on their chests showed which guilds they were affiliated with.

‘Small Stone Guild.’

I was certain of it. Out of all the guilds in Castle Rock, it was known as a rather large guild and…

‘The people our Jo Hye-Jin reported.’

Our eyes met even as we passed each other. It was more like I was looking at them, but they must’ve realized it because they also stared at us as we headed toward the castle.

‘What should I talk about?’

It was true that I wanted to have a conversation. I really wanted to know exactly what happened, the kind of incidents that took place, and their opinions on those incidents.

“Lady Marilyn,” I called out.

“Yes, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?”

“There’s something I’m curious about… what kind of relationship does Castle Rock have with the free city citizens that are staying here?” I asked.

“I believe we’re friendly toward them. We spend time with the people by inviting them to the castle and we even receive help from the citizens that live here. Not only did they help in reducing the number of monsters, but they helped the knights as well so we’re thankful for them,” she explained.

“I see,” I said.

“It may not be as much as Lindel, but we’re trying to make things convenient for the citizens here and we have been implementing policies for that. We’ve been thinking about the benefits for not just the permanent residents, but for the free city citizens as well,” Marilyn added.

“*Ooohhh.*”

“Any other questions?” she asked.

“No, that’s all, but I would like to ask you for a favor, Lady Marilyn.”

“Yes?”

“To be honest, another reason why I came to Castle Rock was that I wanted to sign a contract with a few of the guilds here. If we can sell the potions our guild is distributing to Castle Rock, then I think it’ll help both sides,” I explained.

“I see…” she said, nodding.

“If you’re okay with it, I’d like it if you could introduce me to some people.” I requested.

“Yes, of course! I’d be happy to help you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young…” she answered.

‘This should take care of the contract… ’

The only thing left to do was to slowly meet those people and when I was making the plan in my head, I heard someone’s voice.

“Lady Marilyn.”

It was my first time hearing this man’s voice. I saw him and he was a bit tall.

‘Who’s this guy?’

When Jo Hye-Jin’s expression turned dark, I immediately discovered the man’s identity.

CHAPTER 153
LADY MARILYN (3)

'Who's this guy?'

He was the guild master of the Small Stone Guild. The same guild Jo Hye-Jin came from. When I activated Mind's Eye, I immediately saw his stats and attributes. Although they weren't bad, they weren't great either, so I thought that they weren't worth remembering. I wasn't really in the position to say something like that, but as someone who had met many amazing people, he wasn't anything special.

His nature was…

'Passionate and ambitious.'

His unique habit was…

'Two-faced… '

His habit sounded dishonorable and it was a type of skill that didn't have any bonus effects. I started imagining what kind of person he was.

'Ah ha… '

After recalling the incident with Jo Hye-Jin and seeing him trying to talk to us gave me an idea. Basically, he just wanted to be part of the group. I didn't know exactly what he wanted, but he was either notifying us of his existence or was wary of us. I guess he didn't realize that calling Lady Marilyn during a parade like this was rude or he had already planned on doing this because he looked as if he was trying to mark his territory. I wasn't that condescending to say something about it, but it did put me in a bad mood.

"*Oh,* Mr. Song Jung-Wook," Lady Marilyn greeted.

Marilyn spoke but I didn't really care. As such, all I did was quietly wrap my arm around Jung Ha-Yan's shoulders and passed him. Naturally, Marilyn ignored him and

started running toward us because to her, talking to me was more important.

“Who was that?” I asked.

“*Oh,* that was Mr. Song Jung-Wook and he’s the guild master of the Small Stone Guild…” she answered.

When I glanced back at him, I saw his frown and it was natural for him to react that way since he had been completely ignored. Of course, it didn’t matter to me because he didn’t talk to me first and it was Lady Marilyn that ran here on her own. All I did was walk with Jung Ha-Yan, so the embarrassing incident just now wasn’t my fault.

“*Ah*, the Small Stone Guild.”

“Yes…”

“I heard about them being a pretty big guild in Castle Rock and their expedition performance’s good too. They captured three rare-ranked dungeons and one epic-ranked dungeon, right?” I asked.

“Well… I-I don’t really know the details…”

“It’s fine, Lady Marilyn. I almost missed an important person, so if you don’t mind, would you mind calling for him?” I asked.

“Yes, of course. Sir Rodrick. Could you please call for Mr. Song Jung-Wook?” she asked a knight.

“Yes, M’lady.”

The competent knight started running and I guess Marillyn’s action had really hurt his pride because Song Jung-Wook’s face had become more serious. Of course, no one liked being told where to go, but he wouldn’t have a choice but to come here because it was Lady Marilyn that called him here. In the end, I saw him approaching us while biting his lips.

“I’m sorry about earlier, Mr. Song Jung-Wook. There were too many things going on.” Marilyn apologized.

“No, it’s fine, M’lady,” Song Jung-Wook said, shaking his head.

“Anyway, this is Mr. Lee Ki-Young from Lindel and he’s the sub guild master of the Blue Guild. He said he wanted to speak with you…” she explained.

“I see…”

I saw him glancing at me and he looked as if he was expecting me to talk to him. He must’ve thought that there was a special meaning behind me calling for him and I saw him extending his hand while talking.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Song Jung-Wook, the guild master of the Small Stone Guild.”

‘Sigh… ’

“So, where’s the guild master of the Blue Guild?” he asked.

‘This bastard… ’

“I wanted to officially meet him, so this is a good opportunity,” he added.

‘Why is he talking casually to me?’

“And… it’s been awhile Hye-Jin. I never imagined you would join the Blue Guild,” he said to Jo Hye-Jin.

“Yes, it has been a while, Mr. Song Jung-Wook,” she said.

‘Is he ignoring me?’

The situation was absurd, but I understood his intention. I was just a sub guild master and Song Jung-Wook was the guild master of the guild that represented Castle Rock. If I had to categorize our ranks, his rank was higher than mine. This also applied to age and the duration we had been in this world. He was acting like his usual self and was treating me with disrespect.

‘Is there really a person who still doesn’t know that I’m an honorary bishop?’

I guess the free city citizens of Castle Rock hadn’t heard the news just yet and I thought maybe I should put up an ad in the newspaper. I did come here to do business, but I wasn’t planning on lowering myself to do it because there wasn’t a rule that said a salesperson should lower themselves to close a deal. Of course, I was

going to play along with him, but he wasn't as strong as Cha Hee-Ra and his potential wasn't good as Jo Hye-Jin's so I wasn't planning on begging for his attention. If anything, he should be the one *begging* for my attention. Raising my voice and fighting here wouldn't be wise, but I didn't bother to say anything. Instead, I looked at Lady Marilyn quietly as if asking her what was going on. She looked surprised and spoke up.

"P-Please respect him."

"M'lady?" Song Jung-Woo asked, dumbfounded.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young is a guest here and you've been rude," she added.

"L-Lady… Marilyn…" he stuttered.

"I'm quite disappointed in your actions, Mr. Song Jung-Wook," she remarked.

"That's…"

"I'll apologize on his behalf, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," she said to me.

"*Ahem*, it's fine. You shouldn't be the one to apologize anyway… Please forget what I said earlier," I told Marilyn.

"Excuse me?" she asked.

"Regarding the potion. I was originally going to enjoy my time here, but I don't think there's a need to do that anymore. I think it'll be best if I return as soon as we finish our work here," I explained.

"*Oh!*"

Lady Marilyn looked disappointed and Jung Ha-Yan looked really happy and when I pulled Jung Ha-Yan closer to me, she came even closer as if to show us off.

'That expression doesn't fit her… '

Jung Ha-Yan's *very* happy face made her look arrogant and it was as if she wanted to tell the world that she was the person I loved the most. She seemed like she was trying to give off a deadly look, but she just looked cute to me and naturally, Marilyn's

face turned pale. It wasn't because of Jung Ha-Yan. She probably understood the meaning behind my answer earlier.

'I don't care about sales or making a potion contract. I just want to return as soon as I'm done with my work here. I was really looking forward to traveling to Castle Rock, but it's below my expectations. My mood has been ruined because of rude people. If I knew Castle Rock was like this, I wouldn't have come here… '

I was certain that Lady Marilyn's head was filled with negative thoughts right now.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, you see…"

"Let's head back, M'lady," I said, cutting her off.

It was obvious what her choice was going to be and not long after, I saw her talking to that bastard Song Jung-Wook.

"Please make an official apology."

"Excuse me?" he asked, astonished.

"I want you to make an official apology for being rude to Mr. Lee Ki-Young just now, Mr. Song Jung-Wook," she repeated.

"Rude?" he repeated.

'It's not something he should be overreacting about… '

"I believe you know better than I do what I'm talking about, Mr. Song Jung-Wook. Please apologize to Mr. Lee Ki-Young for treating him rudely earlier. If you don't, I won't ever see you again." She threatened.

Marilyn looked as if she had been wronged and it was a good thing that Father Judas wasn't around. If he wasn't walking far ahead while talking to Kim Hyun-Sung, that bastard would've been surrounded by the shrine's priest by now.

"It's fine, Lady Marilyn. You don't have to do this," I told her.

"No, you're a guest here, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," she insisted.

'I didn't come here as a guest though… '

"Being rude to Mr. Lee Ki-Young is the same as being rude to my family. I don't know what my father will think, but I must hear you apologize to him," she said with determination.

"M'lady…"

Naturally, I looked at her as if I was touched because it was an undeniable fact that Lady Marilyn was overdoing it for me. I was certain Castle Rock wouldn't like it if the Small Stone Guild and Castle Rock came to hate each other and the reason why Song Jung-Wook felt so pressured was because Lady Marilyn was immature and stubborn. If I had to explain their relationship, Lady Marilyn had more power, but…

'I'm sure it'll hurt his pride.'

To Song Jung-Wook, it was a bolt out of the blue.

"Mr. Song Jung-Wook!" Lady Marilyn yelled.

"Lady Marilyn, it's fine," I calmly said.

A wolf in sheep's clothing.[1] I myself thought that I looked spiteful because the situation itself was bad and both the free city and imperial people were watching us. As the person that represented the free city citizens, Song Jung-Wook was in a position where he had to bow to me.

'Good… '

It wouldn't be a bad idea to use the opportunity to show who had more power, but the problem was whether this bastard was going to bow to me or not.

'It seems like he really cares about his pride.'

I had a feeling that he wasn't going to give in easily because I would have done the same if I was him. Jo Hye-Jin was watching and a few of his guild members were watching as well. Not only that but the imperial citizens as well as the free city citizens who had no affiliations were focused on us. When I thought that I should stop teasing, I saw Song Jung-Wook slowly bowing.

'Wow… '

It seemed like I wouldn't get anything from his apology, but despite that, I knew why he bowed to me.

'It's because of Lady Marilyn… '

There was no other answer other than the fact that he wanted to impress her.

"Please forgive me for being rude, sub guild master Lee Ki-Young," Song Jung-Wook said.

"It's fine, Mr. Song Jung-Wook," I told him.

"It's our first meeting and I was being rude," he added.

"*Hahaha*, I was being rude as well. It seems like there was a misunderstanding." I chuckled.

"…"

"Lady Marilyn, it's fine now. The mistake was made due to a misunderstanding, so I think it's best to forgive him." I suggested.

"…"

As the sub guild master of the Blue Guild, the image of me forgiving the guild master of Castle Rock's Small Stone Guild on the streets was beautiful. It wasn't just his guild. I was sure the majority of the other guilds, clans, and the people who were watching felt *something.*

'We shouldn't mess with that bastard.'

I was certain they had this thought; naturally, that wasn't the only thing I obtained.

"I was actually planning on visiting the Small Stone Guild, Mr. Song Jung-Wook. I'd like it if you could stop by the castle and ask for me, actually, I'll visit the guild myself," I told him.

"…"

"*Hahahaha.* I'm glad I made another connection today. If there's nothing else, I'll get going. Was there something else you wanted to say, Lady Marilyn?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. It's nothing important… I'll see you next time, Mr. Song Jung-Wook…" she shook her head to me before bidding her farewell to Song Jung-Wook.

"Ha-Yan. Let's go Miss Hye-Jin," I said.

"Okay, oppa."

"Yes, sub guild master."

"And… Miss Hye-Jin?" I called out.

"Yes?"

"I don't know what happened while you were in Castle Rock, but you don't have to keep your head down," I told her.

"…"

"And there's no need to be polite to other guild's guild masters because you're part of the Blue Guild now. You have to remember that when you bow to other guilds and clans, it's the same as the Blue Guild bowing to them." I warned her.

"*Oh…*"

"I won't expect much, but just keep that in mind," I said.

"Understood," she replied.

I thought about how I should bring Jo Hye-Jin to my side, so I was going to call for Lady Marilyn, but when I saw how Mr. Song missed his chance to speak up, I started to think of great ideas.

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1. The original Korean proverb here was 시어머니보다 말리는 시누이가 더 미운 법 which is literally translated as 'A sister-in-law trying to calm the mother-in-law is more hateful than the scolding mother-in-law.' It basically means that someone is

saying all the nice and caring things on the outside, but is actually trying to cause trouble on the inside. ☜

CHAPTER 154
SMALL STONE (1)

The Blue Guild adapted to Castle Rock very well. Lady Marilyn prepared a big party for us and we were able to take a break by eating and drinking delicious food and wine. It felt like the exhaustion I felt from traveling was being washed away. This was also an extension of my work, but being able to enjoy Castle Rock as if I was on vacation was a special benefit and naturally, it didn't apply to Kim Hyun-Sung. I knew the majority of the people here, but Kim Hyun-Sung had to go around and meet other influential nobles.

'He looked exhausted… '

The problem was that other religious figures and nobles from other cities came to Castle Rock after hearing that I was here. Kim Hyun-Sung looked really tired because he had to memorize and talk with the people at the banquet that lasted for five days. Unlike me who was used to it, the sight didn't fit him since all he did was fight, eat, and sleep, but among them, Castle Rock's count was giving him the hardest time. As the father of Marilyn Castlerock, he talked to Kim Hyun-Sung the most and as the noble that had more of a military atmosphere than a civil official, he really liked Kim Hyun-Sung. The count's stats were better than most citizens and because of him, Marilyn Castlerock stayed beside me, which made me feel flustered.

"*Ahem*, it seems that my daughter has been bothering you, honorable bishop," the count said.

"It's fine, Count Castlerock. I've been enjoying my conversation with your smart daughter and thanks to her, I've been smiling a lot recently," I said.

"Thank you very much for saying that. *Ahem*… My daughter becomes really focused when she becomes interested in something… After watching her recently, it seems like she has taken a big interest in you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," the count said after clearing his throat with a cough.

"*Haha*…"

“This is between us, but she begged me to offer a wedding proposal, which made me feel very flustered. *Oh,* this is a secret between us. She actually asked me to ask you…” he said in a low voice.

“Oh, I… see…”

I was flustered because dangerous situations like this could happen.

“I’m embarrassed to talk about it myself, but… *ugh*. I just can’t win against my daughter’s stubbornness, so I’m sorry for constantly talking about it.” He apologized.

“No, I understand, sir…”

This was my second defense.

Since Marilyn was Count Castlerock’s only child, he wanted to fulfill everything his daughter wanted. As such, he was basically a father who accepted everything about Lady Marilyn. He first looked at me as if I was some kind of a thief, but after thinking about it, he had been pressuring me. Honestly, I wasn’t that bad of a catch because I was the sub guild master of a powerful guild and the Vatican even made me an honorable bishop. The emperor’s faction and the pope’s faction didn’t have a good relationship with each other, but if I became the bridge that joined them together, then my worth would shoot through the roof.

‘The count is probably thinking that he could gain a lot of things.’

Nobles were calculative, but Count Castlerock wasn’t as bad as the others. Before he started calculating, I was sure he just wanted to fulfill Marilyn’s wish, but then he thought that it wouldn’t be so bad if she and I were in a relationship.

“By the way, I heard you have a connection with the Red Mercenary Queen,” the count said.

“Yes, I do,” I replied.

“And the mage that’s always with you is?”

“Yes, although it’s a bit embarrassing for me to say…”

“I see. *Ahem*… then does my daughter…”

“I’m sure she knows,” I told him.

The count seemed like he was thinking about something, so I had no choice but to speak up first. “Lady Marilyn… Lady Marilyn might be confused because it hasn’t been that long since her coming-of-age ceremony and I’m sure she finds the free city citizens interesting. Of course, I would like to have your beautiful daughter as my wife, but I’m very worried that I may ruin Lady Marilyn’s future because of one mistake. After all, the free city citizens have their own lives and Lady Marilyn has a bright future ahead of her.”

“That’s true, but…”

“Since Lady Marilyn will be managing Castle Rock after inheriting it, I think it’ll be best to keep an eye on her rather than rushing things,” I suggested.

“*Ahem*.”

“I’ll make sure to talk to Lady Marilyn,” I added.

“Then, I’ll leave it up to you. You’re a better person than I thought, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Count Castlerock complimented.

‘Shit… did I just leave a good impression?’

“It’s nothing, sir. Anyone would think the same,” I quickly said.

“*Haha!* No need to be embarrassed. By the way, how would you like to eat with me today? I happened to have gotten myself some good wine. My… my daughter has been looking forward to it,” he offered.

“I appreciate the offer, but I have business I must take care of today… how about tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow should be fine,” he answered.

“Then, I’ll be going now, Count Castlerock.” I bid farewell to him.

“Yes, it was fun.”

I was out of energy when I closed the door. The majority of the serious lunches I had

with Count Castlerock were about his daughter and based on his slightly uneasy expression, I realized how much of a hard time Marilyn was giving her father these days.

Having a connection with Marilyn wouldn't be bad for me, but it was under the condition that I wouldn't get stuck in Castle Rock. It was strange to call free city citizens commoners from the start, but if they got married to a noble, then they would become a noble as well, but objectively speaking, I didn't really need it.

I was the Vatican's honorable bishop, which was above the nobles and my authority was on the same level as a count, so Count Castlerock wasn't simply having a conversation with me. If Count Castlerock handed the sovereignty over to Marilyn after he died, then it was worth thinking about, but as of right now, Marilyn was nothing but baggage. The imperial citizens' marriage custom consisted of a union between two families and cooperation between two groups and that custom only gave me a headache.

'It's best to manage my relationship with her from a distance.'

This was the right thing to do after thinking about Jung Ha-Yan, Cha Hee-Ra, and Lee Ji-Hye.

As soon as I exited the room, I saw Lady Marilyn approaching me and she looked as if she didn't know anything. It was funny how she had that expression when she was the one that planned all this out.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Did you enjoy your lunch with my father?" she asked.

"I was able to enjoy my lunch thanks to the count making the atmosphere comfortable for me," I answered.

"Th-That's a relief. Have you heard anything from him…"

"I'm a bit embarrassed to say this, but Count Castlerock seems to think that it would be a good idea for you and me to be in a relationship…" I said.

"Really?"

"Yes. *Haha*…"

“I-I hope… you’ll understand my father, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. It seems like my father really likes you…”

‘More like it’s you that really likes me.’

“Count Castlerock seems to cherish you a lot,” I said.

“Yes, that’s true. H-How did you… answer him…” Marilyn asked nervously.

“I told him I needed to think about it. I have my own life as a free city citizen and it’s a bit early for the both of us to think about marriage,” I replied.

“Then that means?”

“I think it’ll be best to take our time getting to know each other, M’lady,” I told her.

“*Oh!* Okay, okay!” she said excitedly.

“I also told him to move today’s plan to tomorrow. I have business I need to take care of… I’ll get going then,” I informed her before saying goodbye.

“Okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Please let me know if you need help with anything…” she said.

“Sure, I will.”

I decided to leave it at that for now and since I had been enjoying my time off, it was now time for me to work. When I walked with light steps, I saw Jung Ha-Yan wearing a different expression from Marilyn. I really felt like a cheater because I met another woman not long after having a conversation with the previous woman and even though Kim Ye-Ri’s voice started to fill my head, I tried my best to ignore it.

“Oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan called out.

“Let’s go, Ha-Yan. Did you wait long?” I asked.

“No, I haven’t,” she answered.

“Did you have lunch?” I asked.

“Yes. I ate with Mr. Hyun-Sung, Deok-Gu oppa, Ye-Ri, Miss Hee-Young, Miss Hye-Jin, and Miss Jung-Hyun,” she replied.

“That’s good and Mr. Hyun-Sung…”

“He said he was going to take a look around. He mentioned investigating something…”

“*Hm,* okay. Let’s go,” I told her.

“Okay!”

“You brought the documents, right?” I asked her.

“I did!”

“You seem to be in a good mood today,” I commented.

“I-It has been a while since we’ve been alone. *Hehe*…” Jung Ha-Yan said shyly.

“You’re right, it has been a while,” I said in agreement.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed a bit excited because it had been a while since we went out and the reason why I was taking Jung Ha-Yan with me wasn’t just because I needed a guard. If I needed guards, I could use Castle Rock’s knights who were secretly protecting me, the holy knights, and the heresy inquisitors. The reason why I brought Jung Ha-Yan with me was because I wanted to reward her for being patient all this time. There had been several incidents and situations that were unacceptable according to her standards, but she managed to endure and I wanted to thank her for that.

‘I’ll take care of you little by little, Ha-Yan.’

It was like training a puppy because I would give her a reward every time she was patient. I had to keep that in mind because it would be a big problem if she went berserk in Castle Rock. In order to prevent Jung Ha-Yan from going crazy, Lee Ji-Hye didn’t cross the line while both Cha Hee-Ra and Kasugano Yuno were already stronger than Jung Ha-Yan, but Lady Marilyn was an ordinary person with no powers. She could disappear without a trace if she suddenly got excited because of the atmosphere.

'It's a good thing Ha-Yan's mentality was fixed after the regression incident.'

If Jung Ha-Yan's mentality hadn't been fixed back then, then we would have experienced hundreds of incidents because of her.

"Where are we headed right now?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"We'll go on a date first and then head to the Small Stone Guild," I answered.

"A date…" she repeated.

"It's because you've been working hard recently," I told her.

She nodded her head quickly. She must've thought she had done something great since her expression became cuter than I thought.

"L-Let's go…" she stuttered.

"Okay. There seem to be a lot more things to see around Castle Rock than I thought," I told her.

"Really?"

"Of course…"

It was short, but going on a date with her was the right thing to do.

"Oppa! Look at that! The tree is shaped like a turtle," she said excitedly.

"Yeah, I see it."

We were enjoying the beautiful scenery.

"It's so cute," Jung Ha-Yan commented.

"How much is this?" I asked the merchant.

I even bought her a cute accessory we saw while passing by.

"Do you want to watch a play?" I asked.

“I do!” she answered.

The date we were on was no different from the dates on Earth.

“We can even ride a boat over there!’ she said while pointing.

“…”

“Let’s go ride it, Oppa,” she suggested.

“Let’s… ride that later,” I said, hesitating.

“But I want to ride it right now…” she said disappointingly.

“We don’t have time, but I’m sure we’ll have the chance later,” I said, consoling her.

The culture here wasn’t as great compared on Earth, but there were still plenty of things we could enjoy.

“*Hehehe*.”

When I saw Jung Ha-Yan’s bright smile, I wondered why I didn’t do this for her earlier. Of course, I had been busy, but I thought that making some time and bringing her out on a date like this wasn’t a bad idea.

‘If she’s stressed, then I can help her relieve it.’

“I really like it, *hehe*…” she commented.

“I’m glad…”

We held hands, hugged from time to time, and lightly kissed as the sun went down.

‘Was she always this pretty?’

For a while now, I knew I was falling for Jung Ha-Yan little by little, but seeing her face-to-face like this made me feel more attracted to her and I started to like her even more because she had been acting more like an ordinary person recently.

“Thanks for everything, Ha-Yan.”

“M-Me too…”

I know it sounds crazy, but if I were to get married, it wouldn’t be bad getting married to someone like Jung Ha-Yan.

“Let’s head to the Small Stone Guild,” I told her.

“Okay!”

CHAPTER 155
SMALL STONE (2)

The short date ended. I had a good time with Jung Ha-Yan and I got an idea of how things worked in Castle Rock. I was basically doing market research and discovered the prices of items and how high or low the market prices were. If I had to give an overall review, I was very satisfied; Castle Rock's status was way better than I thought.

'It's probably a given… '

The hunting grounds around Lindel were already saturated with people and even though there was a lot of work, it meant there were a lot of people trying to work. Compared to Lindel, Castle Rock was still overflowing with work, so in a way, this was an up-and-coming city. There were plenty of resources and since the free city citizens had already settled here, it was safe to say that Castle Rock was not only a strategic hub but an economic hub as well.

'It's more useful than I thought… '

It actually might not be so bad to buy some land here. Merchants and adventurers were moving around busily and there was also a demand for daily necessities. What was even more interesting was…

'Signs of danger?'

It didn't seem like a city where a big incident would occur, but according to Kim Hyun-Sung, something was going to happen in this city within a month. Our regressor told me there was going to be danger in Castle Rock while showing me a few documents as proof and that was the reason why we went on an expedition to Castle Rock. The people didn't seem to care at all about the sign Kim Hyun-Sung had mentioned. Kim Hyun-Sung could've made it all up, but the current Castle Rock was peaceful. I was sure that the current mood was similar to his past life and an incident must have suddenly occurred while he wasn't as prepared as we were right now.

'The majority of the people here probably died… '

Marilyn and the Small Stone Guild probably weren't an exception either.

"From the people's point of view, they're lucky," I said.

"*Huh?* Did you say something, Oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"After looking around a bit, I think I know what kind of potion is being distributed here; I just made a comment based on that," I answered.

"*Oh!* So you're saying the people are lucky to be able to use your potion!" she said excitedly.

"Yeah. As it was mentioned before, Castle Rock doesn't have enough priests so the quality of the potion here isn't that great and it's even more lacking compared to the potion I made. To be honest, I think even a child can make a better potion," I explained.

"I see…"

"It hasn't been that long since the overall level of alchemists increased and since there's a high demand, they've been selling low-quality potions just like that. Castle Rock is a good place…" I added and started to explain.

"I understand!" she exclaimed.

"I didn't think the Small Stone Guild were making potions, too," I said.

"I see…"

I gave a small smile to Jung Ha-Yan who responded positively and as we walked, I saw the Small Stone Guild.

'It's fancy… '

The guild house itself was better than the Blue Guild's guild house and I noticed that it was fairly large. I wasn't knowledgeable about architecture, but it was obvious that they used high-quality materials and were trying to show it off.

'It's not as good as the Red Mercenary Guild though… '

Song Jung-Wook was exactly the kind of person I assumed him to be. He cared a lot about his outer appearance and his ambition.

When we entered the guild, the guild members looked at us. We didn't need to act awkward because being confident was the better thing to do. When a guild staff member greeted us, I replied and nodded. After speaking with the guide that approached us, we headed toward the living room and saw Mr. Jung-Wook. There were other guild members as well and although their stats weren't bad, they gave off an intense mood as if they were holding an armed protest. This was the first time I saw Song Jung-Wook after the incident on the streets and as expected, he looked serious.

'Naturally… '

He had been completely humiliated in front of everyone and as an ambitious man, I was sure that respect was *very* important to him. With his personality, he must be holding a grudge.

'So what? What's he going to do about it?'

It was obvious who had the higher rank, so I didn't need to act inferior to him. That applied to both Earth and here.

"It has been a while," I said, greeting him.

"Yes, sub guild master of the Blue Guild. It has been a while," Song Jung-Wook said.

"*Hahaha*. Our first meeting wasn't that great, but I'm glad to see you like this," I told him.

"Yes, it's very nice to see you again, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

"*Hahaha*. Please relax, Small Stone Guild's master. People might think you've met your enemy," I said.

"…"

"You're going to hurt my feelings, Mr. Jung-Wook. If you keep staring at me like that, I'll feel disappointed," I added.

"…"

"Well, it is an important meeting, *haha*," I said with a chuckle.

"You seem pretty relaxed for someone who has an important meeting coming up, sub guild master. I can't believe you went on a date in the middle of the day… I feel like an idiot for making preparations. No matter how famous you are in Lindel these days…" he complained.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah…" I said, cutting him off.

"Castle Rock isn't Lindel's subcontractor or subordinate, so you should show some respect, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," he said.

"You seem a bit on edge, Mr. Jung-Woo. *Hahaha*," I chuckled once more.

"I'm not joking, sub guild master," he said seriously.

"I think there's a misunderstanding," I told him.

"What do you…"

"The important meeting I mentioned was for the Small Stone Guild, so it's not that important to me. *Haha*. Is it rude for me to go on a date with the person I love before coming to this meeting? *Pffft!*" I burst into laughter once again.

"You…"

"Also… I'm not sure if you were tailing me, but… I think I'm going to be a bit disappointed in you, Mr. Jung-Wook. What you have done was no different from an invasion of privacy," I added.

He frowned as he started to feel flustered. It seemed like he still didn't know what I was talking about.

'I miss Ito Sota… '

Despite being ambitious, he had no idea about power… there was definitely a problem. Even though I gave him a lot of hints, he still had that same attitude so I guess he really didn't like me. For a guy who grew this large guild, he was pretty

close-minded.

'Uh… '

I knew that my actions must have caused him to despise me, but there could be another reason why he didn't like me. It could be…

'Lady Marilyn?'

It was possible since it was common for men who desired power to use immature noblewomen to succeed. I realized that Song Jung-Wook and I were connected in a lot of ways, which made it interesting for me.

'First Jo Hye-Jin and now, Marilyn… '

I guess he was annoyed by me constantly chuckling because he immediately started talking. "Please go back. I thought it would be good to at least meet you once since Lady Marilyn has arranged it, but I don't want to work with a rude person."

"*Oh,* so you're going to send me back, guild master?" I asked.

"I've asked you politely, sub guild master. The Small Stone Guild will not do any trades with you and it's not just our guild. The guilds and clans in Castle Rock wouldn't want to do business with the Blue Guild," he said.

"You'll regret this," I warned him.

"I won't be polite the second time. If you don't want to be forced out of here, please leave," he warned.

"I should be the one telling you that, guild master. I'd appreciate it if you could at least hear me out before you get worked up." I requested.

"…"

"I'll take that as you accepting my request. *Pffft!* I'll go over the details then, Mr. Song Jung-Wook. When you were on Earth, have you heard of something like this? Young people and artists gather in a specific area," I started talking.

"What are you…"

“Please listen for now. *Haha!* I’m not sure what happened, but anyway, the young people and artists started to slowly develop the area they gathered. Their methods may be different since some draw murals, others opened stores with unique concepts, and some held their own festivals and created their own cultures.” I continued.

“…”

“The press will immediately focus on that area. The area where the artists work! They’ll also talk about the delicious restaurants in the area… *pffft!* Social media influencers and celebrities will visit the area the artists and young people developed as if it was their own neighborhood and that area will become even more famous. I’m sure you’ve seen a lot of cases like this,” I said.

“So… how is that related to the situation we’re in?” Song Jung-Wook asked.

“A place like this looks nice when you first look at it, but in the end, the area will experience a painful ending,” I answered.

“…”

“They’ll just appear out of nowhere,” I said.

“What…”

“I’m talking about large capital and big corporations,” I told him.

“*Um…*”

“The landlord who makes money by not doing anything will immediately raise the rent and they’ll kick out the young artists who developed the area. The young artists would shed tears of blood, but there’s nothing they can do about it because they don’t have the power to do anything. I know my explanation was long, but basically, those people will lose their homes in a foolish way,” I said.

Song Jung-Wook frowned.

“Large franchises and self-employed businesses that want to make money will take this opportunity to move in and the street that was once occupied with young artists will be filled with establishments with large capitals. Here’s the question! In this

situation, who's the young artist and who's the establishment with the large capitals?" I asked.

Song Jung-Wook's lips quivered.

"Who has the product that can influence the market?" I asked another question.

The tip of his fingers flinched.

"Who has a close relationship with the Red Mercenary Guild, the Black Swan Guild, and was named the honorable bishop by the Vatican's cardinal and is close to the Lady of Castle Rock?"

He immediately reacted. I thought he would either get down on his knees or get angry, but it seemed like they picked the latter. As the guild master of the Small Stone Guild, Song Jung-Wook was quietly staring at me, but the people behind him were already yelling as their faces turned red.

"That's ridiculous!"

"Why… why is it ridiculous?"

Their faces immediately turned pale and they were shaking as if they had been threatened. They looked scared. Obviously, they weren't trembling because of what I said. The answer would be obvious if you looked at the person they were looking at. They were looking at Jung Ha-Yan standing behind me.

'Oh… shit. I'm getting goosebumps.'

I also thought that it was scary how Jung Ha-Yan was glaring at them.

'I take back what I said about marriage… '

CHAPTER 156
SMALL STONE (3)

“Why… why is it ridiculous?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

She wasn’t threatening them by releasing her mana, but the expression she had made them feel indescribable fear. Her hair must have been slowly rising because she was suppressing her mana and the way she looked straight ahead without blinking made it seem like she was emotionless. I wasn’t sure if it was the effect of Mind’s Eye, but it felt like I could feel the madness deep inside her.

‘Oh jeez… ’

Overall, she gave off a threatening mood. Being able to instill fear into people without using any magic and just by her expression alone was a skill. It felt as if a dark shadow was oppressing everyone except me.

“It’s not… ridiculous,” she said.

‘I take back what I said about marriage.’

I was sure I would die before I could live up to my name…

I knew that Jung Ha-Yan had become stronger and seeing people like Cha Hee-Ra and Kasugano Yuno who were stronger than most people probably stressed her out because she knew she was lacking compared to them. It could be said that a huge incident didn’t occur because Jung Ha-Yan was busy. Aside from the time she spent with me, she invested all her time into magic because she had to get stronger. She wanted to grow more than yesterday and grow even more tomorrow—people like her were geniuses.

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - Advocate in Love]

[Job - Archmage - Epic Rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 18/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 17/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 30/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 71/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 25/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 63/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 81/Above legendary growth limit]

[Gear]

[Staff of Water of Life of Lost Light - Epic Rank]

[Robe of Shadow Imbued with Magic - Epic Rank]

[Divine Protection - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - How to Become a Mage - Epic Rank]

[Overall Review - Her magic stat is over 80 points. When taking the item effect into account, her stats are definitely absurd considering the fact that she's been here for less than a year. It's difficult to say that her growth is balanced since her other stats are terrible, but it's still absurd. It's nice that she's growing fast, but it could harm her body, so you must help her balance her growth. Of course, her mental health comes first. Please try harder, player Lee Ki-Young.]

Currently, Jung Ha-Yan's magic stat was higher than Hwang Jung-Yeon's, and just as the overall review said, it was difficult to believe that she grew this much despite being here for less than a year. Her other stats weren't that good since she had been focusing on one area, but they were better than nothing.

After I organized my thoughts, I glanced at Jung Ha-Yan and noticed that she still had the same expression.

'Yikes… '

The master of the Small Stone Guild was known to be high-leveled, so he was trying to brush off her influence, but the underlings behind him were afraid of Jung Ha-Yan. When the guild master used his magic, the members behind him sighed.

"*Pant… pant…*"

"Ha-Yan, loosen up," I told her.

"Okay…"

"I apologize. It seems like my girlfriend is in a bad mood today. If it weren't for you, we would've still been enjoying our date. *Ahem*. Anyway, I have the power to make impossible things happen," I said.

"…"

"I'll keep it simple since you don't believe me. We can ask Lady Marilyn or we can discuss the religious reasons even though it'll be a bit difficult. We can completely destroy the market by spreading very cheap potions and items in Castle Rock or we can move outstanding free city citizens from Lindel to here. *Oh!* Don't you think it'll be nice if the Red Mercenary Guild established a branch here? I think it'll be good if I asked Hee-Ra noona what she thinks about starting a business," I explained.

"…"

"What about moving the Sora Guild that Kasugano Yuno and I are managing here? The initial investment cost will be pretty high, but we can create a large potion factory in Castle Rock. The Small Stone Guild is also in the potion business, right? I'm

not sure how much you're currently selling, but I can afford to sell at even half the price you're selling," I added.

"…"

"How about I also sell your source of income, monster by-products to Castle Rock? At a cheaper price, of course. Or I can purchase the land you're currently standing on. *Hahaha*. Castle Rock is only lending you this land because all of you are free city citizens, but since I have the honorary bishop title, I can purchase land," I told them.

"…"

"Of course, you're free to move to another city. You can go to another city and develop the area with the same mindset the young artists had. When it's ripe, I'll be sure to visit and pick the sweet fruits you worked so hard in growing. It can be anywhere in the Holy Empire of Benigoa," I said.

"Y-You're… crazy…"

"Whether you return to Lindel… remain in Castle Rock… or move to a completely different city, I'll always be watching you guys. If you want to avoid me, you can either join the Republic or the Union of Kingdoms or live in the mountains while committing crimes," I told them.

"…"

"Test me if you think I'm lying," I warned.

The room was filled with silence. It felt like it got even quieter compared to when Jung Ha-Yan was staring at them earlier. I was certain they didn't take my explanation as a joke because Song Jung-Wook's pale face was proof of that. Naturally, it was impossible for me to carry out all those exhausting tasks. Forcefully selling monster by-products to Castle Rock and building a potion factory here was definitely a loss for me. Smart people may question whether my plan was possible or not, but this was slightly different from whether it was feasible or not. What if the guy in front of us was crazier than we thought? What if he could throw everything away and harass us with pure malice? From the moment they had that thought, it was already game over, and naturally, I thought it was time to deliver the final blow. But it was amusing how they immediately reacted as soon as I spoke.

“Money and power are the things that give people like me power in a world where power comes first. I know people will take their place based on the stats shown on their status windows and their personal strength, which makes them have high self-esteem, but… trying to go against me with the little power you have is like using an egg to crack a rock,” I explained.

“…”

“If you don’t have the power to break the framework of society, it’s your job to just stay quiet. What do you think I did to the people who didn’t do that? How do you think I got to where I am today despite being here for less than a year? You understand what I’m saying, right? You have two choices. Do you want to be a young artist or a parasite that siphons nutrients from establishments with large capitals?” I asked.

The answer was obvious…

“W-What do we need to do, sub guild master?” Song Jung-Wook asked.

He suddenly became polite.

“You picked your answer. I’m glad I don’t have to do anything tiring, Master. *Hahaha*. Now, we can have a proper meeting. This is great,” I commented.

I wasn’t sure what he was thinking, but on the outside, he looked like he had decided to obey me and it didn’t matter if he was being honest or not because getting them on my side wasn’t the important part.

“*Hahaha*. Is there a place that’s more comfortable than this boring office? *Oh,* you there. Why don’t you bring us some alcohol? It’s fine right, Master?” I asked.

“Yes… of course. Young-Cheol… do as he asks… and bring us something to drink,” Song Jung-Hwan ordered.

“Yes, Master.”

“*Hahaha*. It’s not fun if I drink by myself. You should drink with me too, Master. You can relax too, Ha-Yan. What do you want to drink?” I asked her.

“*Oh…* okay! I’ll just have milk, Oppa,” she answered.

“You heard her right, Mr. Young-Cheol? Also, it would be great if you could bring some snacks. *Oh!* I already brought the contract with me,” I told Song Jung-Wook.

“I see…”

“You can take your time reading it. It’s nothing big. I’m sure you already know that I’m managing a potion factory and it’s sad that I’m the only one using high-quality potions. I heard Castle Rock doesn’t have enough priests so I rushed over here. *Hahaha*. This is all for Castle Rock,” I explained.

“Well… thank you… for being considerate, sub guild master,” he said in a low voice.

“I was thinking about regularly supplying potions to the large guilds in Castle Rock. Of course, it won’t be for free, but it’ll be very cheap. *Oh,* you should probably see the item first,” I said.

“Yes.”

He didn’t seem all that excited, but the item itself was high-quality. I made it so it wasn’t a low-quality potion. I showed it because it was better to increase the brand’s value.

“Take a look…”

[Red HP Recovery Potion - Rare Rank]

[An amazing potion with healing effects. It possesses mid to high-range healing effects. It prevents poisoning and bleeding. After taking the potion, the target’s endurance will slightly increase for a certain period of time. Manufacturer - Lee Ki-Young.]

When I grabbed the potion after looking through my bag, the guild members looked surprised. Song Jung-Wook probably didn’t think that I would be selling something like this because he looked at me suspiciously, but nothing in the world was free. Not only did I establish who had more power in the conversation earlier, but my plan was designed in a way that I would get my money’s worth.

“The price is cheap. 40 gold,” I told him.

“*Oh…*”

“40 gold per bottle,” I added.

“T-That’s too expensive…” he stammered.

“*Hahaha*. It’s not expensive at all, Master. Didn’t you read the effects just now? It’s a reasonable price and I know you have enough funds to buy it. It’ll also increase your hunting efficiency, so there won’t be any problems,” I explained.

“O-Our guild isn’t capable of purchasing a potion for 40 gold and we can’t even purchase it in bulk… No matter how much I think about it, 20 gold is the most we can pay. Considering the amount written in the contract, the amount we’ll be paying annually is thousands…” Song Jung-Hwan explained.

“40 gold,” I said with determination.

“H-How about… 30 gold?” he asked.

“*Hahaha*. You’re starting to disappoint me, Master. Trying to buy an item like this for 30 gold is basically robbing me. It will be 40 gold,” I insisted.

“That’s…”

“It’s 40 gold,” I repeated.

“O-Okay,” he said.

“You just need to sign the contract and you don’t have to worry so much, Master. We’ll make sure to take good care of you. I’m very generous to the people close to me. *Haha*,” I reassured him.

“I see…”

“Now, now. You can just sign here and you’ll receive the potion right away,” I added.

I was the only one satisfied with this beautiful situation. This was what you call a real deal.

CHAPTER 157
HYPOCRITE (1)

"*Hahaha*. It seems like you understand me better than I thought," I said.

"I feel the same way, sub guild master," Song Jung-Wook said in agreement.

"We'll probably have more business meetings in the future and of course, it could be a bit more advantageous for the Small Stone Guild. I'm talking about something that'll benefit the both of us," I told him.

"I see…"

"Ah… and I've also heard some interesting things today, especially about Miss Hye-Jin," I said to him.

"I see. I was a bit surprised that she joined the Blue Guild and as I explained earlier, she's not that great of a person. Some people call her the apostle of justice, but… *tsk*. I'm sure it's because of a personal grudge. Our guild was actually cleared of all charges," he explained.

"*Oh!* Got it," I commented.

"I personally clashed with her a lot. At first, I thought she was the obedient type, but as soon as she got promoted to a key position, she started meddling in every single situation. I wasn't sure if she wanted a raise or if there was something else she wanted, but it happened constantly which made it difficult for me," he added.

"What were you charged with?" I asked.

"That's…"

"If it's difficult for you to say, I have a way of finding out on my own, Mr. Song Jung-Wook," I told him.

"*Ha*… *haha*. Of course, I can tell you since we have been cleared of the charges. It was

monster trading," he answered.

"*Ah.*"

"There were also tax issues… there was an issue with how the guild staff members were being treated, but the main lawsuit was the illegal trading of monsters," he added.

"I see…" I said, nodding.

"It wasn't a serious issue, but Jo Hye-Jin made a big deal about it and she's not very flexible as well. She was also problematic in dungeons and in other places. She also caused trouble with the other guilds," he explained.

"I agree that she does seem that way; she's also a very stubborn person," I commented.

"She's a problematic person in many different ways. *Oh!* You should have some too, Miss Ha-Yan," Song Jung-Wook offered.

"*Oh,* no… I'm okay, Mr. Song Jung-Wook." Jung Ha-Yan declined.

"I guess Miss Ha-Yan doesn't like alcohol," he remarked.

'He's more obedient than I thought.'

It was as if the arrogant attitude he had shown earlier never happened. The way he was trying to please me reminded me of myself. The way he flattered me made me feel superior.

'Of course, I don't know if he's being genuine about it or not… '

Considering his unique habit, it was likely that he wasn't being genuine and I was certain that he was either trying to backstab me or trying to use me until I was no longer of use to him.

'That's why it's more fun… '

The way he was talking badly about Jo Hye-Jin to me was a sight to see. I was sure I had to filter half of what he was saying, but I had an idea about Jo Hye-Jin's position.

Song Jung-Wook probably used the press to spread bad rumors about her.

'She's not a good person' or *'She's kind of strange*' were probably the things he said to isolate her. People would trust the words of those with power and it wouldn't take that long to isolate a woman like Jo Hye-Jin.

When I remained quiet for a while, Song Jung-Wook quickly started talking.

"Since it's already late, why not spend the night here, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" he offered.

"*Oh!* Look at the time. I appreciate the offer, but I think it'll be best if we return since Lady Marilyn will be worried, *haha*," I replied.

"…"

He wasn't happy with my reply, and I saw him slightly frown for a moment. I expected that kind of reaction from him.

"We'll get going now since we drank a lot… we'll talk more next time. By the way… could I leave you in charge of the request I made earlier?" I asked.

"Of course. I'll contact all the other guilds within Castle Rock and get started on the contract," he answered.

"Thank you very much. You're more competent than I thought… Master," I commented.

"Thank you. *Ahem*… It's pretty late, so how about an escort…"

"*Ah,* I appreciate it, but no thank you. *Haha*. I understand why you're worried, but I'm safe," I said, rejecting his offer.

"Excuse me?" he asked.

"I guess I didn't mention it earlier. Regarding the Lindel terrorist attack, I'm not sure if you remember, but I've become a bit sensitive when it comes to safety. I've been sensitive, but my Hee-Ra noona has been taking care of me a lot… the Red Mercenary Guild's shadow members have been guarding me," I explained.

"What?"

“Naturally, after I arrived in Castle Rock, the knights of the lord’s castle and the Vatican’s heresy inquisitors have been helping me as well. I’m not an important person, but I guess I’m loved by many people. *Hahaha*. I’m saying this as a joke, but if the master of the Small Stone Guild tries to harm me, it’ll complicate the situation,” I said, warning him.

“I-I see,” he said, stuttering.

There was cold sweat on his face, so I guess he *had* other thoughts.

“I’m sure that won’t happen though. I’ll get going now. Let’s go, Ha-Yan.”

“Okay, oppa!”

When we exited, it was nighttime in Castle Rock. We saw the same scenery in the afternoon, but this sight wasn’t bad either. The medieval city that was a bit unpolished was very charming in my eyes. I guess I drank a lot more than I thought because I was having useless thoughts. The drink the Small Stone Guild prepared must’ve been much stronger than I thought. When I started walking while quietly holding Jung Ha-Yan’s arm, I noticed her trying to support me.

“Y-You can lean on me,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Thanks. I’m feeling drunk all of a sudden,” I said.

“Are you having a hard time walking?” she asked, concerned.

“No, I can take care of my own body. More than that, thanks for everything today, Ha-Yan,” I told her.

“It was nothing. All I did was support you like this. *Hehehe*. But I’m a bit surprised,” she said.

“About what?”

“About Miss Hye-Jin…” she answered.

“*Ahhh.*”

Now that I think about it, this was Jung Ha-Yan’s first time hearing about Jo Hye-Jin.

Unlike me who knew what Jo Hye-Jin had gone through, this was Jung Ha-Yan's chance to listen to the kind of person she was so I was sure she enjoyed it.

"I didn't think she was that kind of person…" she commented.

"*Ah,* it's not a bad thing and we've only heard the story from the Small Stone Guild's side. Shouldn't we listen to Miss Jo Hye-Jin's side as well?" I asked.

"Yes! Of course, we should listen to her side!" she answered energetically.

"But hearing the information earlier does put us in an uncomfortable situation and even though I don't want to admit it, having a whistleblower makes me feel a bit uneasy," I explained.

"Yes, you're right. It's uncomfortable, Oppa," she nodded, agreeing with me.

"But it's not easy to act based on your conscience…" I added.

"Of course! Y-You should follow your conscience!" she exclaimed in agreement.

I couldn't help but laugh because Jung Ha-Yan had turned into a parrot that agreed with everything I said and even though I was curious about her actual opinion, I was certain that she didn't really care because it wasn't like Jung Ha-Yan to really think about other people. She probably thought agreeing to my every word was the right thing to do right now.

The information we heard from Song Jung-Wook about Jo Hye-Jin was simple and it wasn't as big of a deal as I thought. If Song Jung-Wook didn't exaggerate anything, then the story would be boring.

'Of course, I don't think he told me everything.'

Anyway, the most interesting part was that the majority of the people who joined the Small Stone Guild had been in the tutorial dungeon with Jo Hye-Jin, so the guild was made up of her relatives and acquaintances. It was basically like the current Blue Guild. If I had to give an example, it was like Jung Ha-Yan suddenly exposing all of my secrets, so it was understandable for the guild members to think of her as a backstabber.

'Illegal monster trading… '

Even though they had been cleared of all charges, Jo Hye-Jin must have told the truth.

'I'm sure of it… '

The Small Stone Guild had a lot to hide and even though there wasn't any solid evidence, based on their nature and habit, the villain and the righteous one were clear. The Small Stone Guild was trading monsters illegally in a way I didn't know about. It was possible that a few people from the lord's castle were involved, as well as the other guilds and clans.

'He's an expert.'

If possible, I wanted to hear Jo Hye-Jin's side as well and before I knew it, we were passing by the square.

"Are you really drunk?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"I'm feeling a bit dizzy, but I'm okay," I answered.

"You look really tired," she said.

"I'm fine, Ha-Yan."

"Maybe it would've been best if we rested there," she remarked.

"I told you I'm fine. We're almost there," I told her.

"I-I'm a bit tired too," she mumbled.

When I followed Jung Ha-Yan's gaze, I saw a luxurious inn. Even though she didn't say much, I immediately realized what Jung Ha-Yan meant and her eyes were filled with indescribable, desperate determination.

'Oh jeez… '

"L-Let's rest for a bit," she suggested.

I guess she must have somewhat planned this. When we took the long way, I thought it was because she wanted to spend more time with me, but I guess this was her real goal. It felt like she was trying to pull me toward that place.

“You seem exhausted; no, I’m sure you’re exhausted,” she said.

She was even forcefully turning me into a tired person, but what was even more surprising was that I agreed with her. Since we had fun in the afternoon, I couldn’t help but think about spending more time with her.

“*Hm…*”

“…”

Just when I was about to make a decision…

“There you are.”

“Oh…”

I heard a voice in front of us. Jung Ha-Yan puffed her cheeks because of the unwelcome guest and I couldn’t help but look at them embarrassingly because the location Jung Ha-Yan and I were standing was kind of an awkward spot.

“Miss Hye-Jin, what brings you out here?” I asked.

“I came to find you and Miss Ha-Yan,” she answered.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“I guess you could say that I came out here as a guard since it’s dark outside. Castle Rock is more dangerous than Lindel and there are bad people in the narrow alleys. I’m sure nothing will happen since you have Miss Ha-Yan with you, but as a guard, doing this will put me at ease,” Jo Hye-Jin explained.

“There are knights at the castle too,” I told her.

“I’m not sure if you heard, but the guild master left me in charge to protect you at times like these. I think he’s worried about the Lindel terrorist attack,” she said.

“*Ahhhhh*…”

I realized once again that our regressor really cherished me.

“Since it’s late, I thought coming out to find you was the right thing to do and I felt uneasy as well… Let’s head back,” she suggested.

“Okay, thank you for coming out to find me. *Hm*… now that I think about it, I don’t think we had a long conversation before,” I told her.

“*Ah…*”

“How about it?” I asked her.

“Sorry?”

“How about spending time with me?” I asked.

I thought it wasn’t a bad idea since I had to have an honest conversation with her at least once. This was the perfect time since I had just come back from talking to the Small Stone Guild. Even though Jung Ha-Yan was pouting, I thought it would be a good idea to have a drink or two with her at a nearby pub. I expected her to accept my invitation, but her reaction was different from what I expected. Not only was she glaring at me, but she was shaking.

“Y-You’re being rude,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“I didn’t think you were that kind of person. Were you always this rude?!” she yelled.

Something completely unexpected happened…

‘What kind of bullshit is this?’

CHAPTER 158
HYPOCRITE (2)

I wondered if I made any mistakes, but I couldn't think of anything. I felt kind of slow because I was a bit drunk.

'Was I being rude?'

Naturally, I questioned if it was necessary for her to react that way when all I asked was for us to go get a drink and it was to the point that I understood why Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild said she was inflexible.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know what I said wrong," I said.

"A-Are you being serious?! Even Miss Ha-Yan is next to you…" Jo Hye-Jin said angrily.

"Is Ha-Yan being here a problem?" I asked.

"That's not what I meant!" she yelled angrily.

'What the hell is she talking about?'

It was then that I realized the reason behind the misunderstanding.

'Huh… '

I realized it when I saw her blushing. The issue was the environment we were in, not what I said. She must have thought that I wanted to spend time with her in front of the luxurious inn in the middle of the night. She basically saw me as a person who sexually harassed his co-workers. Even Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't have this kind of misunderstanding. When I kept telling her that she was being ridiculous, Jo Hye-Jin must've felt even more embarrassed because her face turned red, but when Jung Ha-Yan spoke up, Jo Hye-Jin realized that she misunderstood everything.

"Wh-What is she talking about?"

“I’m not sure…” I answered.

“*Oh…*”

“…”

Jo Hye-Jin started looking around out of embarrassment because she realized her mistake.

“That’s… well…”

“Is there a problem?” I asked.

“I-It’s nothing. I must’ve misunderstood…”

“What kind of misunderstanding?” I asked.

“It’s nothing,” she answered.

“Were you having strange thoughts…”

“I told you it’s nothing,” she said once again.

“I think I know what you think of me, Miss Hye-Jin,” I told her.

“That’s…”

“I’m a bit disappointed,” I added.

“I-I’m sorry,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

‘This is my chance… ’

Being able to tease her like this was really good. When thinking about the type of person Jo Hye-Jin was, she seemed like the type that would decline if someone asked her to drink with them. It was possible that taking us back to the castle was the priority, but in the current situation, there wasn’t a reason for her to decline my offer.

“Well, I was joking anyway and what I said could cause a misunderstanding. My relationship with the opposite sex isn’t all pure and innocent so… so it’s

understandable for me to get treated that way," I said, teasing her.

"That's… not true," she said.

"You don't have to worry about it. I'm used to it…" I added.

"N-No, that's not what I meant," she stuttered.

"Do you really feel sorry?" I asked.

"I do…"

"Then… how about accepting my offer from earlier and killing some time before heading back?" I asked her.

Jo Hye-Jin was contemplating. At any moment, she was going to nod in agreement and as expected, I heard her voice. "If it's only for a moment…"

"Great, let's head in," I said.

"Sub guild master, that's…"

"*Huh?* Does the inn not have a pub?" I asked.

"*Oh,* no… I'm sure they do," she said.

Earlier, I only said it to tease her, but I guess to her, I wasn't a trustworthy person. Even though polygamy and polyandry were taken for granted, my relationship with women was a mess. She must have thought that I was trying to seduce her.

'I did think about it… '

Jo Hye-Jin wasn't really interested in me.

When I opened the door to the inn, the receptionist came up to us.

"Do you have a reservation…"

"*Oh,* we're not here to spend the night. We'd like to go to the bar or the pub," I told them.

When I glanced over at Jung Ha-Yan, I noticed her hurriedly taking gold out of her pocket and handing it to the receptionist.

'Why did she give them so much?'

I was sure that they would be happy even with one gold, but since she grabbed however many she could, it seemed like she gave them at least five gold. The receptionist looked as if they hit the jackpot.

"A quiet place if possible," I added.

"Of course. Right this way," the receptionist respectfully said.

Having money did make things comfortable. When we walked upstairs, I noticed a nice spot overlooking the city.

"We'll take that spot," I said.

"Okay…"

"What would you like to order?" they asked.

"You can bring anything nice and the price doesn't matter," I answered.

"Alright. I hope you enjoy your time," the receptionist said before leaving.

"Thank you…"

When we sat down, Jo Hye-Jin looked at me with a slightly awkward expression as if she wasn't used to this. It must be her first time coming to a place like this. It was a bit fancy, but since she used to be one of the key members of the Small Stone Guild, I was sure she had enough gold to come here. But with how she acted, I was certain either Song Jung-Wook was stingier than I thought or Jo Hye-Jin lived a pretty simple life. I wanted to bet on the latter because it was hard to imagine her not getting paid a lot.

"Is this your first time coming to a place like this?" I asked her.

"*Huh?* Yes…" she answered.

“I heard you spent a long time in Castle Rock, so that’s surprising. I thought you would’ve gone to a lot of nice places since you were an executive at the Small Stone Guild… it seems like you’ve lived a simple life while you were here,” I said.

“Simple… I guess you’re right. I don’t recall spending gold on unnecessary things,” she said.

“*Hahaha*, it’s not unnecessary.” I pointed out.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“Saving gold isn’t a good thing. You have to spend it to use it as intended. The people who have gold in this society need to use it in order for society to function. I believe you understand what I mean,” I explained.

“*Ah…”*

“The receptionist who received a tip just now will spend that as well and the gold we spend today will be spent elsewhere. If you look below, the ordinary citizens and the people walking into restaurants and shops owned by poor citizens will also spend their gold. I’m sure you already know this, but the person at the top of the pyramid needs to spend their gold for the economy to function well,” I added.

“I understand what you mean, but…”

“Yes?” I asked

“Maybe I’m misunderstanding, but it sounds like you’re looking down on those people…” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“I’m not, but it’s necessary to be aware,” I told her.

“Are you saying that you’re above those people?” she asked.

“Yes. Personally, having that kind of awareness makes it easier to face them. Basically, you need to keep thinking about your position and the impact your actions will bring,” I explained.

“I’m having a difficult time understanding what you’re trying to say, sub guild master,” she confessed.

“I must be talking nonsense because I’m drunk. I didn’t offer to get a drink to talk about this, but I guess you can consider this as an extension of our conversation. *Ahem*. I don’t know if you’re aware, but the master of the Small Stone Guild and I made an agreement today,” I told her.

“That’s… a relief,” she said in a low voice.

As expected, she didn’t look so good because she probably thought that I heard stories about her. Obviously, I wasn’t thinking about hiding it; actually, I wanted to have a deeper conversation with her.

“Did he tell you?” she asked.

“About the whistleblower thing?” I asked.

“Yes…”

“Yes, he did. Before I could ask why you left the Small Stone Guild and why you came to Lindel, he told me what happened first. He seemed to resent you a bit and I understand why since you basically betrayed the comrades you were with since the tutorial dungeon,” I answered.

“…”

“It seemed like everyone knew what happened. I don’t know why you were trying to hide it in the first place, but it was a fact that I was going to eventually find out,” I added.

“Are you criticizing me?” she asked.

“What did Mr. Hyun-Sung say? When he brought you to the guild?” I asked.

“He said it didn’t matter,” Jo Hye-Jin replied.

She looked a bit relaxed…

‘Ohh.’

It took me some time to catch on, but to her, Kim Hyun-Sung wasn’t just an employer to her.

'He picked her.'

I wasn't sure if it was intentional or not, but Kim Hyun-Sung definitely had his eyes on this woman.

"He actually told me that I did a good job and that it's important to stick to my beliefs… that's what he said," she added.

"It's a reasonable argument and something that Mr. Hyun-Sung would say. I'm also the same way. I'm not criticizing you. Didn't you report them for illegal monster trading and tax issues?" I asked.

"They were also involved in race slave trading," she said.

"I see. I didn't hear about that, but that's fine. I'll get straight to the point. I'm not criticizing you, but I do think you're an idiot," I bluntly confessed.

"Excuse me?" she asked, doubting her ears.

"You're an idiot," I repeated.

"What do you…"

"This society doesn't think too fondly of whistleblowers. Even if you did it because of your beliefs, based on the result, you're really an idiot. Why in the world would you do something like that?" I asked.

"I don't really understand what you're saying. Didn't you say just now that you weren't criticizing me?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

She seemed as if she was panicking, but it was natural for her to react that way.

"I'm sure I mentioned earlier that one has to always be aware of their position. Have you once thought about the consequences of being a whistleblower?" I asked.

"Why should I? They committed a crime!"

"I wasn't telling you to think about them. I'm talking about the people who'll be impacted because of your actions. I'm referring to the Small Stone Guild. After that incident, the guild had no choice but to restructure their guild, and even though

they've been cleared of all charges, they're still involved in tax issues," I explained, cutting her off.

"…"

"It seemed like they let go of a lot of the guild staff members. Many people lost their jobs within a day. From what I heard, some people committed suicide and others went out of their way to go hunting and ended up being in a bad situation," I added.

"That's…"

"Female staff members started working on the streets and the men who suddenly became unemployed went hunting to feed their families. The young members who had just been hired lost their jobs and are living in the slums begging for food," I told her.

"Is that… true?" Jo Hye-Jin asked with wide eyes.

"No, I made it up just now," I answered.

"S-Sub guild master? Why would you joke…"

"But it's not unrealistic… I'm sure the things I said just now won't actually happen to them, but it's possible that a few people will actually have to live *that* kind of life. We never looked for them, but if we did, I'm sure we can find them easily. Your former comrades who you reported are living just fine, but I'm sure innocent people must have been affected," I explained.

"*Oh…*"

"That's the reason why I called you an idiot. Leaving it to your conscience won't solve everything, Miss Jo Hye-Jin. If you wanted to put an end to it, you should've planned it out more carefully. In the end, what you did was insulting," I told her.

"…"

"You didn't contribute anything. Whether it was Castle Rock's development or carrying out your beliefs, you haven't done anything right. You basically reported your comrades without submitting any solid proof so you didn't do anything other than relieving your personal conscience. Even if your plan succeeded, I still would've

called you an idiot."

"…"

"Do you know how many guild staff members there are at the Small Stone Guild? This is also including the people who weren't in the workforce or had no choice but to cooperate with the guild master in order to get by. You're not someone who can take responsibility for all of those people. At this point, I think it's a relief that your plan ended up failing because hundreds of people would've ended up on the streets."

"…"

"Have you ever thought once about the issues I told you just now?" I asked her.

CHAPTER 159
HYPOCRITE (3)

"I… haven't," Jo Hye-Jin answered.

Of course not. If she did think about those things, she wouldn't have handled it the way she had done. She wouldn't have made that choice if she considered the different issues.

"You need to think about the consequences of your actions because you could harm other people. There are many people I could easily kill," I said.

"…"

"The reason why I'm telling you that you always need to be aware of your position is that you always need to think about the consequences of your actions. People like us, *oh,* have a drink," I said.

"No… I won't be drinking, sub guild master," she said, rejecting my offer.

"I'm saying it out of embarrassment because it seems like I'm the only one that's drunk. I'll request an official escort when I return, so just keep me company," I told her.

"Then just a little bit…" Jo Hye-Jin said.

"Thank you for drinking with me. Anyway, that's what I'm trying to say. If I were you, I would've done more than that. I'm sure someone like you must have thought the same thing as me," I said.

"What do you…"

"You know very well that being a whistleblower won't solve the issue, right? You just need to resolve the issues one by one and then put an end to Song Jung-Wook and your comrades. The guild will function normally and it won't cause any harm to the guild staff members," I answered.

"…"

"It's my personal opinion, but I'm assuming you thought about doing this at least once," I added.

'Because you're not dumb… '

"The reason why you didn't do that was because you didn't want to cause conflict with your comrades. You didn't want to get rid of them, but you wanted to follow your beliefs. You only became a whistleblower because you thought it was a worthy compromise. What do you think about my story? You tried different ways to convince them, but they didn't listen, so becoming a whistleblower was your last resort," I said.

There was a strange silence and even though she had been quiet up until now, it felt like she became even quieter. Jung Ha-Yan was just eating while looking at Jo Hye-Jin, but Jo Hye-Jin drank quietly. Her silence meant I was right and when I talked again, I immediately heard her answer.

"In the end, they abandoned you…"

"That's not the right description."

"No, I'm correct. This may be my first time seeing Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild, but I have an idea as to what he had done and the same thing goes for the friends you were with during the tutorial dungeon," I said.

"What…"

"They're all greedy and they're the type of people who would want to keep climbing to the top. They don't really care about conscience or morality. More items, more money, and more power—that's what those people want," I explained.

"It's not enough to judge them," she commented.

"They're very different from you. I'm sure they've been working behind the scenes to kick you out. First, they spread bad rumors about you within Castle Rock. Second, they submitted an official request to other guilds and clans to not accept you because I'm sure you interrupting their *event* won't look good to other people," I told her.

“I already knew… that much,” she said in a low voice.

“I’ve heard many stories from other people and they said things like how you used your body to possess the power you have now or that you got into trouble often with other guilds and clans. It’s really absurd because spreading those kinds of rumors was something we did as students and yet, they’re still doing that now. I’m not sure if they’re trying to make you an outcast, but I think both children and adults are immature,” I explained.

“They’re all false rumors and I don’t really care about them,” Jo Hye-Jin responded.

“A convincing rumor can become the truth and thanks to those rumors, your reputation and position are now in ruins. How does it feel to get backstabbed for doing something *good?*” I asked.

“I don’t think much of it because I was prepared,” she answered.

“Then what do you think about the decision you made? The result of you avoiding the issue because you didn’t want conflict and this situation where nothing has been resolved—people call that hypocrisy,” I said.

“I’m not a hypocrite!” she yelled.

Bang!

The things on the table suddenly fell all over the place. Jo Hye-Jin must be angry because she was trying to catch her breath. The situation was kind of sudden, but seeing her react that way made me think that I hit the nail on the head. Jung Ha-Yan was more flustered than me. I saw Jo Hye-Jin immediately get up from her seat, but she quietly grabbed her own hands and sat back down.

“I don’t know about the others, but you have no right to say that, sub guild master Lee Ki-Young. You’re the hypocrite,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“*Ah.*”

“I’m not an idiot. I know the real you is different from what people say about you,” she said.

“You’re sharp,” I complimented.

'I didn't think she knew... '

"So what?" I asked.

"What do you mean so what?!" she yelled angrily.

"I understand what you're trying to say, Miss Hye-Jin because I'm not the most innocent person you know. I know that my business and the things I do are borderline illegal. So what about it?" I asked.

"That's what it means to be a real hypocrite, sub guild master Lee Ki-Young," she said.

"I've been donating tens of thousands of gold every month to the Vatican," I told her.

"..."

"That fund is used to support the believers within the Holy Empire who are living a rough life and the free city citizens who are having a hard time settling down," I added.

"So what?!"

"That's not all... I also run a free soup kitchen in the slums of Lindel. I'm sure you remember team leader Kim Mi-Young back at the guild. Not too long ago, she was living in the slums begging for food every day and she was living the life of a beggar with her two children. Who do you think saved her from that life?" I asked.

"That's..."

"She isn't the only one. The Blue Guild doesn't discriminate when hiring. I ordered people not to discriminate when hiring people regardless if they were disabled, single mothers, or warriors suffering from serious injuries. The order has been very beneficial to the Blue Guild, but that itself was a great social activity," I said.

"Then how are you going to explain the fact that you collaborated with a large guild and controlled the press?" she asked.

"You know more than I thought," I commented.

"I happened to find out about it because when you work for a guild, you tend to see

things you don't want to see," she replied.

"Is there a law in the Holy Empire that says we're not allowed to control the press?" I asked.

"The Holy Empire still doesn't understand the concept of the press you created because to them, the press is nothing more than writing words on paper. The majority of the people don't understand the seriousness of your actions, Mr. Lee Ki-Young, " Jo Hye-Jin answered.

As expected, she was sharp.

"Sub guild master, this is a matter of common sense. What you're doing right now is wrong," she added.

"You think so? Then why aren't you mentioning the issue the Holy Empire currently has?" I asked her.

"What do you…"

"Why are you turning a blind eye to the aristocracy or the monarchy that believes our destiny is determined at birth? If you think about it, with the common sense used on Earth, this is unacceptable, isn't it?" I asked.

"That's their life…"

"If you really want to follow your moral principles, shouldn't you at least start a French Revolution here? Lady Marilyn may even tell you to let them eat cake[1]. It's likely that she doesn't even care about the people in the slums, so how about leading the people right now and making a guillotine?"

"That's… sophistry," she mumbled.

"I'm aware that it's sophistry, but it's natural to say that in a situation like this. The boundaries of the law are very vague, so it's something all free city citizens are confused about because they don't know whether to follow the common sense used on Earth or follow the common sense used here," I explained.

"That's sophistry as well," Jo Hye-Jin remarked.

“There are too many values that are at stake when you act based on personal conscience and the death penalty is a good example. Don’t you think it’s unethical to burn a person who committed a crime to death? A Japanese player named Ito Sota was charged with being a demon worshiper so he was placed in a statue filled with holy water and was subsequently drowned. Don’t you think this is unethical?” I asked her.

“…”

“The death penalty itself is unethical, but it’s a very normal thing here so let’s think about it again. Who's more hypocritical?” I asked.

“It’s… sophistry,” she said once again.

“Me, who’s contributing to society while staying within the boundaries of the law; or you, who ran away after being labeled as a whistleblower because you didn’t want to cause conflict with your comrades. Who is more of a hypocrite?” I asked.

“…”

“I’m not trying to argue with you, Miss Hye-Jin,” I added.

“It doesn’t seem that way. You’re obviously trying to start a fight with me, sub guild master,” she said.

“This kind of conversation comes up quite often while having a drink and it’s just an argument. Think of it as a simple exchange of opinions. I’m not trying to insult you and then make you feel better, but I don’t think of you as a bad person, Miss Hye-Jin. Following your beliefs is a wonderful thing to do,” I complimented her.

“If you’re making fun of me…”

“No, I’m not. You’re closer to Mr. Hyun-Sung, but I admire people who stick to their beliefs. I’m referring to respectable people,” I said, interrupting her.

“You seem to like saying that a lot,” she commented.

“Because it’s my job to make sure those respectable people don’t fall,” I said.

“Sub guild master Lee Ki-Young…”

“I’m a helpful person. Anyway, let’s change the subject and talk about Mr. Song Jung-Wook. If they’re still doing illegal monster trading and race slave trading, what would you do if I had a way of getting rid of them?” I asked.

Jo Hye-Jin looked pretty serious.

“I think I can get revenge for you,” I added.

She looked really serious. Even though she always had a serious face, she looked like she was thinking about different things right now. It was obvious what she was thinking about and I already knew what kind of choice she was going to make. It wasn’t like Jo Hye-Jin to get revenge after being away for so long.

“I don’t need help. You can just… just do your job as the sub guild master,” she said.

“*Ah,* I see.”

“I’m sorry, but I’ll head out first. I’ll put in a request to the knights at the castle to escort you. I’m sorry,” she said apologetically.

I guess she was really hurt because Jo Hye-Jin immediately got up. It wasn’t my intention to ruin her mood, but I was sure I mentioned the things that she wasn’t proud of.

‘Hypocrite.’

The word described her well and she may have realized that too. That was probably the reason why she frowned.

‘She wants to be righteous, but doesn’t want to harm her comrades.’

I was sure there wasn’t another person who was a bigger pushover like her.

When Jo Hye-Jin left, Jung Ha-Yan spoke quietly, “She’s a selfish person. She said she came to escort you, but she left first…”

“*Huh?*”

“I’m talking about Miss Hye-Jin!” Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

"*Ahhh,* don't be so mean to her. It's because she's a nice person," I told her.

"But…"

"Even though she's acting that way now, she'll become a close friend later on," I said.

"What?"

"Friends become close by fighting," I told her.

[Checking Player Jo Hye-Jin's Unique Habit.]

[A flower that blooms in friendship]

It was true that friends would often become even closer after a quarrel.

'My friend!'

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1. 'Let them eat cake' is generally associated with Marie Antoinette saying the peasants should eat cake if they didn't have bread to eat. The queen became a hated symbol of the decadent monarchy and fueled the revolution that would cause her to (literally) lose her head several years later. However, it is questionable whether she actually said it or not. https://www.history.com/news/did-marie-antoinette-really-say-let-them-eat-cake ☜

CHAPTER 160
WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY (1)

Time passed after my conversation with Jo Hye-Jin. We officially started working and even though I had been looking around for a while, Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild was working harder than me, which made the contract progress even faster. He started promoting the potion I made to other guilds and clans as if he had pledged his loyalty to me and before I could give them the contract, he brought me their signed contracts. It seemed like he only visited the castle to get closer to Lady Marilyn and the other nobles, but it was up to him how he spent his free time. I did introduce him to a couple of low-ranked nobles and I was sure he felt that his work was paying off. Of course, that wasn't the reason why he constantly visited the castle.

'Lady Marilyn.'

Song Jung-Wook was moving cautiously and even though I knew a long time ago that he was trying to use Lady Marilyn, seeing him openly target her made me laugh.

'Good luck… '

If Song Jung-Wook and Lady Marilyn ended up together, he would gain a lot of things. He could become a noble, buy land, and be a bit freer from the tax issue. It was none of my business whether he really loved her or not, but the closer he got to Lady Marilyn, the more he was into the big capital I spoke of back then. I didn't really need to say anything to him since he wasn't rebelling against me, but I knew his intentions weren't good.

Song Jung-Wook wanted to become closer to me, but he didn't want the Blue Guild to have influence over the Small Stone Guild. He carried two faces under the same hood-on the outside he was acting like he was loyal to me, but inside, he was trying to find ways to turn the tables around.

'Dishonorable bastard.'

I wasn't planning on taking care of him until the end. I just needed to keep my distance and wait for the moment to cut my ties with him. Of course, I need to take

advantage of him as much as I can for the time being.

Naturally, Song Jung-Wook wasn't the only busy person. Kim Hyun-Sung's party was also busy since they constantly went outside. Since I came here to do business, I went out every other day, but Kim Hyun-Sung was concentrating on growing Park Deok-Gu and Kim Ye-Ri. His other task was to bring a sign that a monster wave was coming and convince people that it was going to come.

"We'll be heading out, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Take care of yourself, Deok-Gu," I said.

"*Geez,* you don't have to worry. We're just taking a walk outside and doing a survey on the surroundings," Park Deok-Gu remarked.

"As long as you're safe. You should be careful too, Miss Hee-Young…" I said to her.

"Don't worry about me."

"You too, Ha-Yan," I said to Jung Ha-Yan.

"Okay… *heuk*."

I was able to leave this to Kim Hyun-Sung because I knew he could take care of it without me getting involved. Having a comrade you could trust was a very fun thing. Kim Hyun-Sung was going to gather data based on the event that was going to happen in the future and that data was going to be announced to everyone in Castle Rock. When Castle Rock entered into a state of war, it would be different from his past life because we would stop the monster wave or the named monster's attack and our regressor could become renowned as the hero who saved Castle Rock. I wasn't sure if it would go as planned, but it was up to me to make that a reality. I was busy with different things, but I could take care of that at the least.

"Wait, Mr. Ki-Young…"

"Yes, Mr. Hyun-Sung?"

"*Um…* did something happen between you and Miss Hye-Jin?" he asked.

"Excuse me?"

“It seemed like you two aren’t getting along recently…” he explained.

“*Oh,* there was a momentary conflict related to work. It was something trivial so you don’t have to worry about it,” I told him.

“I see…”

“I know what you’re worried about, but that won’t happen,” I said, reassuring him.

“*Oh,* right… well… I just want the two of you to…”

“I also want to become friends with Miss Hye-Jin. Since she’s not participating in this expedition, I’m planning on approaching her cautiously. *Haha*,” I said with a chuckle.

“*Haha*. That’s a relief. I feel reassured after hearing you say that. We’ll be off then,” Kim Hyun-Sung said happily.

“Okay, please be careful…”

“Of course…”

‘I guess he’s worried.’

I was also worried because Jo Hye-Jin started to treat me coldly after the incident, but it wasn’t like I couldn’t talk to her at all. A silent cold war was more frightening than a petty quarrel. The fact that we were still talking was a sign that there was still a chance.

When I waved to the party members as they left, I saw them doing the same. Time passed since we arrived in Castle Rock and I had an idea of the things I had to resolve.

‘The first thing is stopping the danger that the city is going to face.’

This was the main goal of this expedition. It was our lovely regressor’s goal as well and it was the reason why our party came to Castle Rock in the first place. Additionally, we would inform Castle Rock of the upcoming danger and strengthen our influence over Castle Rock. I couldn’t really do much since Kim Hyun-Sung was currently working on this goal, but I had to thoroughly prepare for whatever might happen to the city.

'Second is Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild.'

I had to think about whether I should keep working with him or cut him off when I no longer needed him. Finding out how Jo Hye-Jin was going to act was probably the first thing I should do before deciding, but as of right now, preparing cards I could use while maintaining the current situation was the right thing to do. Moreover…

'The third thing is improving my relationship with Miss Jo Hye-Jin.'

It was creating a bond of friendship between her and me. Unlike the first task, the second and third task was something I had to do on my own. If I had to continue working with Jo Hye-Jin, then I needed to know how to control her, at the least, so the key point here was being a reliable friend. Getting closer to her was going to be kind of difficult since she somewhat knew about who I was, but it wasn't impossible because I already had a plan. In that sense, this was my chance since the other party members weren't here. Trying to talk to her to get closer was the right thing to do and even if we didn't become friends, making her either indebted to me or changing her mind about me was important. While Song Jung-Wook was working for me, I didn't just stand by and watch. When I looked up ahead, I saw Jo Hye-Jin seeing the party members off.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung seemed worried," I said to Jo Hye-Jin.

"…"

"He was worried that you and I might fight," I added.

"Unless it's related to work, I don't want to have any other conversation with you, sub guild master," she said coldly.

"This conversation is related to work, Miss Hye-Jin. It's important to promote friendship between the guild members," I told her.

"If you're going to say something strange again…"

"No, it's nothing like that. There seems to be a slight misunderstanding between us, but don't you think it'll be good to talk about it?" I asked.

Her reaction was kind of cold, but she had been acting this way recently. I was sure she was thinking about different things because the things I said before must still be

lingering deep inside her mind.

“When I talked about getting revenge, I said it for you, but it’s also part of my work. Regardless of your personal grudge, if the Small Stone Guild is still doing illegal work, then I need to step in and take action,” I explained.

“…”

“If you’re not busy, I’d like you to come with me, but if you decline, then I’m planning on going by myself. It’s a pretty dangerous place, but I’m sure we’ll come back alive. If I get kidnapped due to bad luck, I’ll probably lose an arm or a leg. I’m *sure* Mr. Hyun-Sung will be very happy,” I told her with a sarcastic smile.

“You’re just…”

“I’m not a bad person, Miss Hye-Jin. This is all related to work. Since the other party members are out working hard, don't you think we need to work hard as well? *Ahem*. Will you go with me?” I asked once again.

“It doesn’t sound like you’re giving me much of a choice. I’ll go with you then,” Jo Hye-Jin replied.

“Thank you…”

I was lucky in a way because Kim Hyun-Sung had asked Jo Hye-Jin to escort me. It basically meant that we would have a wider range of movement.

“Oh, you shouldn’t go there in the clothes you’re currently wearing, so please change your clothes,” I told her.

“Excuse me?”

“I’ve already prepared the clothes for you, so you don’t have to worry,” I added.

“Can I ask where we’re going?” she asked.

“I’ll tell you on our way there because it won’t be fun if I tell you ahead of time. We’ll leave an hour later, so please prepare as soon as possible,” I said, rushing her.

“You have already made up your mind. You’re really demanding,” she remarked.

“I’m good at taking the initiative, so thank you for the compliment,” I replied.

Jo Hye-Jin still didn’t look happy, but when she went in without much complaint, it seemed like she was willing to obey me. She did frown, but since it was going to be a date with a woman who was beautiful in her own way, I thought that it wasn’t so bad. While she was getting ready, I decided to prepare as well. I changed into the clothes I prepared earlier and fixed my hair. Even though it wasn’t the same outfit I wore during the party at the castle, I couldn’t help but smile at how decent I looked.

While waiting in the lobby, I noticed a familiar face. I guess Jo Hye-Jin liked the outfit I prepared for her because she was blushing.

“Do I really have to wear this?” she asked.

“You already changed into it so you don’t have to be embarrassed, Miss Hye-Jin,” I answered.

“B-But it’s… really revealing…” she stuttered.

“You look beautiful so don’t worry,” I said, complimenting her.

I knew the blue dress would look good on her. I felt like I did a good job when I told the receptionist at the castle to decorate it appropriately. It didn’t matter whether she put on makeup or not, but her elegantly tied hair matched the dress very well. Jo Hye-Jin had a hard time adapting to the dress that showed one of her legs and back, but she looked sexy overall.

‘I didn’t think this woman had a feminine side… ’

She was charming in her own way.

“Are we going to a party or something? If you needed company, you could’ve found someone…”

“It’s not just any party, so trust me. The carriage outside is waiting, so let’s go,” I said, interrupting her.

“Okay,” she said.

“Before we go, there’s something I’m curious about.”

“Yes?”

“About the Small Stone Guild… have you ever seen them trade monsters illegally or trade race slaves?” I asked.

“I have. I saw them being locked up in a carriage,” she answered.

“Then that means you don’t know how they actually do the trade. Did you find out about the tax issue and the monster trading when you looked at the ledger?” I asked.

“How did you…”

“Don’t you think the reason why the guild was cleared of all charges was because of insufficient evidence?” I asked her.

“…”

“You asked about our destination earlier, right?”

“Yes…”

“We’re going to the site right now; we’re going to witness it,” I said.

“What…”

“Basically, we’re going there to see for ourselves how the illegal trading is done,” I explained.

Jo Hye-Jin must be at a loss for words because she looked at me with a blank stare. I didn’t need to convince her because she would realize it once she was there.

I took out masks and wore one of them.

“Here’s your mask.”

CHAPTER 161
WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY (2)

I saw Jo Hye-Jin sitting quietly in the carriage while wearing her mask and even though I couldn't see her expression, I had an idea what she was thinking. She seemed a bit anxious after accepting my sudden offer.

"Is there really a place like that?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"There needs to be a demand in order for there to be supply. There has to be people who need it in order for there to be people that can supply it," I explained.

"During the three years I've been in Castle Rock, I've never heard of such a place," she remarked.

"It's not a black market you can find easily in cities. It's a bit more luxurious and the place exists only for VIPs. You can find ordinary black markets in Lindel as well," I told her.

"But still…"

"It's usually at the border where drug trading is most active. Even on Earth, the cities close to the border between the US and Mexico are relatively exposed. I think Castle Rock's geographical location isn't that bad since it's close to the Republic," I said.

"The Republic…"

"They're currently in a cold war, but the items that can be sold during the current situation are selling really well. Humans are animals that are capable of committing crimes no matter the place and time. If I were to exaggerate a bit, the market will operate even during a war," I explained.

"How do you…"

"How do I know all of this? It's having the power to purchase things. Nothing is impossible in this world as long as you have money," I answered, interrupting her.

Honestly, money wasn't the only thing necessary. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that I went through hell in order to discover a path. I knew there was a market or an auction house within Castle Rock, but it wasn't easy to discover the method that had been used for many years. It would've been easy if I asked Song Jung-Wook for help, but I wanted to hide the fact that Jo Hye-Jin and I were going to enter the underground auction house.

While gathering information, the person who helped me was Kasugano Yuno. Who knew that a letter would solve everything? It was all thanks to her. I told her that I would visit Celia once my work was done, but it was a promise I didn't even know when I could fulfill.

"Count Castlerock and Lady Marilyn probably aren't aware of this and the same goes for Mr. Hyun-Sung," I told her.

"Even the guild master…"

I was sure that he didn't know about this in his past life either because during this time, I was certain that Kim Hyun-Sung was working hard to increase the military force within Lindel. He might've heard of it after his work was done, but illegal auction houses were something people like Jo Hye-Jin weren't aware of.

"It's likely that Mr. Hyun-Sung missed trivial things like this since he has a pretty solid goal. Basically, he's looking at the bigger picture," I said.

"The bigger picture?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"Yes. Basically, any event that could have a direct impact on the continent, such as a war or a monster wave. I'm certain he's more focused on the safety of Castle Rock than the underground auction house and that's the reason why we're going to the auction house. If there's someone looking at the bigger picture, there needs to be someone to look at the trivial things," I explained.

"…"

"And that's something you and I are able to do…" I added.

"But…"

"Of course, I'll report it to him, but I don't see the point in reporting trivial matters to

him since our guild master is already dealing with a lot of things," I said.

"I… understand what you're saying. Then why did you ask me to come with you…"

"As I've mentioned before, I like you, Miss Hye-Jin. I also agree with Mr. Hyun-Sung's suggestion to give you a key position. We need to understand each other better in order to make things easier for us. *Oh,* it looks like we're here. It's best not to say much until we enter the underground auction house," I suggested.

"Okay…"

"The name I'll be using here is Kasugano Haruka and I'll call you Yuka," I added.

"Got it," she said.

When we got off the carriage, I saw a pretty quiet banquet hall and I noticed that Jo Hye-Jin was feeling slightly nervous. I thought maybe the sudden escape from her ordinary life was causing her heart to pound like a teenage girl, but that didn't seem like the case. She was worried that we were going to get caught despite wearing masks.

"The others…"

"This isn't the only entrance, Yuka," I said.

"What?" she asked.

"Come closer to me," I told her.

"*Oh…* okay."

'I'm sorry, Hyun-Sung.'

When I quietly held her by her waist, I felt her body become tense. I didn't have any other intentions, but the concept of our disguise for today was a rich Japanese couple who had a good relationship with each other. Moments later, a guide approached us and even though they seemed strong, they weren't hostile. It would be strange to show hostility when we were guests who came here to spend a lot of money.

"Your invitation," they said.

When I spoke up and showed them the invitation I prepared, I saw them nodding.

“You can get on the carriage, sir.”

“How are things looking today?” I asked.

“I’m certain you’ll be satisfied,” the guide answered.

“That’s good to hear…”

After getting on the carriage covered in blackout curtains, the carriage started to move.

“Are you sure it’s safe, sub guild master?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“It’s Haruka, Yuka,” I said, correcting her.

“Are you sure it’s safe, Haruka?” she asked again.

“Of course. My Yuka gets frightened a lot easier than I thought,” I commented and teased her at the same time.

“It’s because of you, Haruka. I can’t help but be worried about your safety,” she said.

“This place is safe, so no need to worry, Yuka. It’s a matter of trust. I guarantee that the guards here are more worried about my safety than you are since they can’t lose a valuable guest,” I told her.

“You said it was dangerous before we left…”

“It was a lie,” I said, cutting her off.

“You’re just…”

“How about you stop being scared and just enjoy it? Have you tried drinking wine while riding a carriage?” I asked.

“…”

I saw Jo Hye-Jin lightly biting her lips, but she didn’t seem relaxed. Naturally, she was

feeling nervous because we were heading to an unknown place while riding a carriage covered by blackout curtains. She was probably afraid that we were falling for a criminal's trap. They were doing this because they had to be thorough with their security, but her reaction wasn't a bad thing. I was sure nothing was going to happen, but we had to be prepared for the worst.

After getting off the carriage, we switched to a different one. When the carriage leaned down and I felt that we were heading downhill, I realize that we were close to our destination. When I drank the remaining wine, I heard a voice outside as if they had been waiting.

"You have arrived."

"Let's go," I said to Jo Hye-Jin.

"Okay, Haruka."

"By the way, don't look around as if you're a country bumpkin," I warned.

"I know," she answered.

When the carriage door opened, the sight in front of me captured my attention. The orange light shining brightly inside the building and the luxurious items on display gave off the same atmosphere as the Benigoa Holy Empire's capital. Jo Hye-Jin also seemed impressed by it, but I guess she must have recalled my warning earlier because she stopped turning her head to look around. Despite that, I noticed her eyes were busy as she took in everything around her.

When I quietly grabbed her hand, her body flinched again, but it felt like she was adapting better than I thought. When we made physical contact, it gave me a different excitement from when I made physical contact with Jung Ha-Yan.

"Let's go in," I said.

"Okay…"

We weren't the only ones wearing masks and obviously, the people here were wearing fancy outfits and the majority of them were also wearing colorful masks. Even though I had a decent income thanks to my potion business, my business was still in the early stages. If it hadn't been for the allowance from Hee-Ra noona and

Kasugano Yuno's support, I wouldn't be able to associate with these people.

I heard people murmuring…

"Are you saying that person is managing this place?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"Of course not. Mr. Song is just one of the many merchants here. Do you really think that idiot is able to manage all of this, Yuka?" I asked.

"No…"

"I'm sure there's going to be a lot to see here so let's enjoy while we're here," I suggested.

"It's not the same atmosphere you described, Haruka. I feel like I'm at a masquerade," she commented.

"It's because all places have two different sides. Anyway, I'm sure you'll notice once we move in deeper because this place is basically the lobby. I'm sure we'll see something interesting once we head inside the room," I explained.

When I quietly raised my hand, I saw a guide approaching us with a tray full of cocktails.

"Have a drink, Yuka," I offered.

"…"

"I'll drink by myself if you don't want one," I said.

It was just like what Jo Hye-Jin had said earlier. This place was more like a social gathering than a black market. That was what it seemed on the outside, at the least. There were waiters who carried around drinks and desserts, offering them to the nobles and there were those who laughed and talked amongst themselves while covering their mouths with a fan, which made me think that all of these people were normal. However, they were a bit different when I used Mind's Eye. Obviously, their nature and unique habits weren't normal.

'It's both men and women… '

There were idealists, ambitious people who simply wanted to show off their power, and people who had the same nature as Ito Sota and me.

'Not only that… '

I saw a murderer who was exactly like Jung Jin-Ho… it was obvious why they were here. I was sure their murder was allowed in this place because I knew what those countless rooms were being used for. The answer was obvious when I looked at the nature of the people who went into those rooms.

'What should I show her first?'

Showing Jo Hye-Jin the weakest thing first was probably best for her mental health because she could become really flustered if I showed her something really extreme from the start. Of course, I was going to show her the market that Song Jung-Wook was managing.

When we were about to move, I heard an unknown voice beside me.

"Excuse me."

"Yes?"

"Do you have some time? If it's okay with your wife, I'd like to spend some time with her…"

"W-Wife…?" Jo Hye-Jin said.

"I guess she's your girlfriend, but it doesn't matter what she is…" the person said.

I couldn't see their face because they were wearing a mask, but just by looking at them, they were obviously pretty strong.

'They're strong.'

What made her stand out was the qipao she was wearing. She was either a Chinese person that came from the Republic or a Taiwanese person staying in the Holy Empire. She was interesting enough that I wanted to spend time with her if I had the chance, but now wasn't the time to chat.

“No, I’m fine,” Jo Hye-Jin declined.

“Hey, don’t be like that. I’m okay with a threesome,” the woman said.

“We’re busy,” I told her.

What bothered me were her eyes behind the mask. I didn’t have the words to describe them, but her gaze was enough to give me goosebumps.

[Checking Player Xiaolin’s Unique Habit.]

[A Strangling Romantist]

‘Shit… ’

“Don’t be like that,” she said.

“No, we’re fine,” I declined once again.

It was only for a moment, but I checked my unique habit.

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young’s Unique Habit.]

[The Temptation of a Liar]

[You seduce the other person and make them listen to you. Increases the chance of being loved by a dangerous member of the opposite sex.]

‘Increases the chance of being loved by a dangerous member of the opposite sex.’

Now that I think about it, I noticed people looking at me. The crazy woman in front of us was the only person who talked to us, but many women were staring at me as well while hiding their faces with a fan.

‘Am I… in danger… ’

It felt like all the crazy women or the women the system deemed dangerous were all gathered here.

'Shit… '

I couldn't help but tighten my grip around Jo Hye-Jin's hand when I felt like I was falling for a criminal's trap.

CHAPTER 162
WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY (3)

I couldn't help but tighten my grip around Jo Hye-Jin's hand as I felt like I was falling for a criminal's trap.

"Don't be like that. I'm a pretty charming person, you know. It's a bit uncomfortable since you can't see my face because of my mask and I can't take off my clothes either…" the woman said.

"I'm sorry but we already have plans. If we get the chance later, let's meet," I suggested.

"How about for a moment? If that's uncomfortable for you, we can go talk in a quiet place. I don't make this kind of offer to just anyone… really," she said.

"I'm sorry," I declined once again.

I glanced at Jo Hye-Jin as if I was asking her to take care of this crazy woman somehow and she must've understood because I saw her standing in front of me. Seeing me hold her hand tightly while looking anxious made her realize that I was feeling uncomfortable.

"I don't know who you are, but please stop. Didn't he decline several times already? Asking him anymore is considered rude," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"*Ohh…*"

"Let's go, Yuka," I said.

"Yes, Haruka," she replied.

"Wait, she's your underling and not your lover?" the woman asked.

"It's none of your business what kind of relationship we're in, so please move aside. If you keep causing us trouble, I will call the guards. I don't want to cause a

commotion, so please move out of our way. The fact that you're blocking our path is very uncomfortable," Jo Hye-Jin responded back.

"Your subordinate is more possessive than I thought," the woman commented.

"It's not a matter of possessiveness, but more like basic courtesy," Jo Hye-Jin said bluntly.

"…"

"…"

The two women glared at each other and even though I was feeling a bit nervous, there wasn't anything this crazy woman could do because she knew that she wasn't allowed to cause a commotion here. Jo Hye-Jin pulled me to her side once again and naturally, our bodies got closer. I was certain there wasn't a hidden meaning behind it. She was just trying to protect me, but for the others, it looked as if she was marking her territory.

The woman whose unique habit was corpse lover looked at me and then quietly moved. Another woman who had the unique habit, the master of pain, turned her attention away from me.

'Why are there so many crazy women here?'

There were a lot of crazy men too, but I didn't care about them, so they were out of the question.

Xiaolin must have realized the crowd was looking at her because she started walking away slowly and the group of men who ran to her side must be her entourage.

"A pen and paper," the woman requested.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"You can send letters to this address. I do hope you contact me," she said.

"I'll contact you if I get the chance," I told her.

"It seems like we both don't want to reveal our identities… Seeing as how you're

here, I think we're in the same position, but I'm more competent than you think. I'm sure I can be helpful in many ways…" she trailed off.

"I can't promise that I'll contact you, but I'll be sure to visit you someday," I said.

'I never will, you bitch… '

"Please do. It's a promise. I'll be on my way…"

'Please go away, please go away. Disappear from the continent… '

The woman kept looking back at me as if she was disappointed and naturally, I felt my goosebumps rising. When I avoided the people's gaze as much as possible, we arrived at a place where we were completely out of their sight.

"You sure are popular," Jo Hye-Jin commented.

"I'm not happy about being popular in a place like this. I want you to walk closer to me," I requested.

"…"

"I don't like to pretend that we have a good relationship, but can't you at least act like you're possessive over me? I'm uncomfortable by the fact that people are looking at me," I explained.

"Did you spray pheromones on yourself or something?" she asked.

"I think it's something similar. It's a bit heartbreaking that it's people like that women are getting influenced by it… anyway, let's walk a bit closer…" I said once again.

"I feel uncomfortable being this close to you," she spoke up.

"It breaks my heart to hear you say that in front of me," I told her.

"…"

But it was effective. Since we walked like a couple whispering sweet words to each other, it felt like the people no longer wanted to approach us. In this place, talking to

other people wasn't a common thing to do, so I was sure that the Xiaolin woman had been a bit aggressive. Since the guards had to be thorough with the security and the guests' safety, I didn't have to be that worried about an incident breaking out here.

'Let's not see each other ever again… '

I didn't really want to meet any of the women here. I couldn't deny the fact that everyone here was skilled, but I didn't want to deal with more women.

Anyway, when we reached our destination, I couldn't help but look around slowly and Jo Hye-In must've gotten used to the place now because she started looking around as well. We were more curious than uncomfortable about this place, but the deeper we went in, the more we realized that the atmosphere was changing. The changes made us wary. In the hallway that was once filled with people, people started disappearing one by one, so I assumed everyone went off to fulfill their personal tasks.

I thought it would be best to go into one of these rooms, so I decided to enter a random room. When I signaled to the guards protecting the door, the large door opened and what I saw was a typical slave auction house. The fact that the people here could casually sit and talk in the luxurious chairs proved that they were used to this kind of situation.

'Is this her first time seeing a different race?'

As soon as I pulled Jo Hye-Jin into a chair, one of the guides approached us.

"Anything is fine," I told them.

"Okay…"

They must have approached us to ask what we wanted to drink.

When I sat on the luxurious, soft chair that was big enough for me to lie down, I wanted to sleep. I guess the auction hadn't started yet because the empty chairs were starting to become occupied.

"What is this place?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"I didn't check so I'm not sure… it looks like a slave auction house though. I'm sure

we'll find out. By the way, don't make a fuss," I warned her.

"I already know," she answered.

"I'm glad you know. By the way, do you know anything about the other races?" I asked.

"No, I've only heard rumors and never seen them myself," she replied.

"Really? That's unfortunate. I don't know much about them either," I told her.

"More than that, isn't that the same woman who approached us earlier?" she asked.

When I followed her gaze, I saw the same woman from earlier.

'Sh... shit... '

"I'm sure she didn't follow us, but don't look at her. I don't want her to know that we're here," I said.

I was certain she was here before we came in. When I turned my attention away from her, I saw someone walking on the stage. The bright lights filled the dark room and the scene reminded me of a movie theater and that was when I heard a voice.

"Thank you for waiting. I would like to thank each and every one of you for visiting our auction house today. You can look forward to the quality of the items we have today because our club is all about sincerity," said the person on the stage.

It was such a cheesy, typical statement. I had high expectations since it was such a luxurious place, but I guess they couldn't do anything about his speech.

"It wouldn't be nice if I took too much of your time since you're all busy people. I know it's sudden, but we'll begin the auction. First up is a 54-year-old elf, Lumania."

From one side of the stage, a woman with long ears appeared and I didn't want to do this, but my eyes widened because I had never seen anyone more beautiful up until now. But that only lasted for a moment. I couldn't help but frown when I noticed how frightened the elf looked when she walked on the stage. She was bare with restraints on her hands and feet and the way she was trembling was enough for me to pity her. Greed quickly filled those who were in their seats and even though the elf was

moving her mouth, I couldn't hear anything, so I guess they used a spell on her.

"We had a hard time capturing this elf. As you can see, she has emerald-colored hair which is rare and she also has a great figure. She's a clean product and has been well taken care of overall, including her nutritional needs," the auctioneer said.

When the two people who came with the elf slowly grabbed the elf's body and restrained her, the elf tried to scream but no sound came out. I thought they were trying to show Lumania's back, but she was so scared that her body was trembling. Tears were rolling down her eyes and her legs must've gone weak because she couldn't stand properly.

"She barely has any combat knowledge, so we purposely didn't train her, but I believe this is a necessary product for those with a sadistic personality because despite being an elf, she's considered pretty young," the auctioneer added.

"I want to hear her voice…"

"If that's your wish, of course, we'll let you hear her voice. To the other guests, we appreciate your understanding. I'll temporarily remove the spell casted on her," they said.

A mage on one side of the stage started reciting a spell and I immediately heard the elf scream. "Please help me! Please… help me. Someone… please help me," the elf begged.

Her voice was clear and beautiful, but her words weren't. She looked around while crying, but no one reacted to her plea. Some of the Holy Empire's nobles didn't even consider other races as individuals and it was obvious what kind of personalities the other people here had.

"She has a nice voice," one of the guests commented.

"*Hahaha*, I knew you would feel that way," the auctioneer boisterously laughed.

Basically, this was the situation…

When I glanced over, I noticed Jo Hye-Jin shaking angrily. She tightened her fist and the frown on her face made it seem like she was in the bathroom. I knew she was going to be angry, but I never imagined that she would be *this* angry. Her personality

was better than I thought.

“I’ll say it again, but if you make a fuss…”

“I… know,” Jo Hye-Jin said, interrupting me.

Basically, we were witnessing a violation of personal rights, and naturally, the scene was difficult to understand with the common sense of modern people. There was no way our righteous Jo Hye-Jin would understand the people who were cheering or raising their fingers to bid on the elf. Those people didn’t care about the pain others felt; no, they actually enjoyed the pain of others.

“What do you think the problem is? What will solve the problem?” I asked her.

“What kind of answer do you want to hear from me?” she asked.

“It’s nothing, Yuka,” I said.

Jo Hye-Jin seemed like she was regretting it, but she also felt stressed by it. I was sure she never imagined that it would be like this. She probably didn’t know the auction house would be *this* big and the connected rooms would be filled with madness because the only thing she saw was a ledger. I was certain she never saw how things actually worked around here.

“This is nothing. I’m actually surprised that it’s a lot cleaner than I thought. I’m sure they have separate spaces for special slaves, but since we don’t have a lot of time, we can just skip it,” I suggested.

“…”

“Now that we saw with our own eyes how the slave trading works, aren’t you curious about how monsters are being used?” I asked her.

“That’s…”

“Let’s go.”

Jo Hye-Jin remained silent.

“I’ll have a glass…”

I knew she was going to react that way.

“Let’s move to the next location, Haruka,” she said.

“Okay, Yuka.”

CHAPTER 163
WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY (4)

"You don't have to feel guilty about it," I said to Jo Hye-Jin.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"Well… I feel like I have an idea as to what you're thinking about. If only I had done my job properly… wasn't that what you were thinking?" I asked.

"That's… not true," she said, hesitating.

'Yeah right… '

I knew what she was thinking about. If she handled the incident properly back then, then things wouldn't have turned out this way because all she really did was ask the higher-ups to conduct an investigation. But even if she did handle the Small Stone Guild incident well, it wouldn't change anything and I could guarantee that her actions wouldn't have any influence over this place.

"Even if you handled it well, it wouldn't change anything," I told her.

"…"

"Mr. Song is only one part of this auction house. As you can see, the outside world doesn't have any influence on this place. As I've mentioned before, I'm sure not even Count Castlerock knows of this place," I said.

"How could he not know what's happening in his own land?" she asked.

"Do you think the mayor of Seoul knows everything that's happening in Seoul? I'm certain some of the people from the count's castle are here and there are people who keep quiet despite knowing about this place. Are you even certain we're in Castle Rock? This is being operated in secrecy so we could be at the border close to the Republic," I explained.

“How…”

“I’m sure there are many things involved, but this isn’t something you need to trouble yourself with, Yuka. What we need to keep in mind is simple. There are some parts that need to be excluded, but what we’re seeing is part of society and the people here are part of the same society,” I added.

“Part of society,” she repeated.

“There isn’t a world where crime doesn’t exist,” I said.

“I don’t really understand what you’re trying to say…” she whispered.

“You’ll slowly understand.”

Even as I quietly explained to her while walking, I noticed Jo Hye-Jin frowning and she was trying to suppress her anger while coldly mumbling. Of course, she wasn’t angry at me. She was angry at this place and herself for not being able to do anything. She was slowly starting to realize what reality was like. I was certain the reality she was facing now was totally different from the world she had been living up until now. At this point, I thought it would be best to talk to her in a friendlier tone, so I got closer to her and spoke, “They really have everything here, don’t you think?”

“I’m sure people think they can get whatever they want as long as they have money because it’s obvious what these people are thinking,” Jo Hye-Jin remarked.

“You’re right. As long as you have money, you can get anything. It can be a slave, drugs, the opposite sex, and even experience,” I told her.

“Experience?” she asked.

“Yeah, experience. I’m asking out of curiosity, but… have you ever killed anyone, Yuka?” I asked.

I thought that maybe she had done it already because people who had been here for as long as she had must have tried killing people. Her first time was probably inside the tutorial dungeon. There were so many times I had to use my spear to protect my food and everyone in our party, except Park Deok-Gu, had killed someone. Jung Ha-Yan had experience and so did Kim Hyun-Sung. I had also killed a few people in the

tutorial dungeon, but I could no longer remember their names.

When I stared at Jo Hye-Jin, I noticed her staring at me as she answered. “I have…”

“I guess it wasn’t a good memory,” I commented.

“It would be strange… if it was a good memory,” she whispered.

“You’re right, it’s not a good memory, but there are people who consider that as a good memory. We free city citizens experience that from time to time, but it’s difficult for nobles to experience something like that and especially here since murder is illegal amongst the imperial citizens. Nobles may have the power to punish ordinary citizens, but they can’t kill an innocent person. Where do you think the crazy people go to satisfy their cravings? I’m certain those kinds of things happen here as well,” I explained.

“No way…” she gasped.

I couldn’t help but laugh when I saw Jo Hye-Jin doubting me. It seemed like she still had hope for humans despite the sight she had seen just now.

When I raised my hand while smiling, I noticed a guide approaching us, and naturally, Jo Hye-Jin looked at me as if questioning my actions.

‘You’ll see… ’

I didn’t need to explain it to her because there was a guide who was always on standby, ready to answer whatever questions we had.

“How can I help you?”

“I need directions,” I said.

“Okay, where are you headed?” the guide asked.

“I want to test out this sword… is there a place where I can do that?” I asked.

“Of course, sir. Would you like me to prepare a monster for you or…”

“I have other plans right now, so if you tell me how to get there, I’ll go there later.

Also, if there's a place where I can see large monsters, please show us how to get there," I requested.

"Would you like me to take you there?" the guide asked.

"No, you can just tell me how to get there," I answered.

"You can follow this path and on the right side, you'll see exit three. If you follow that path, you'll see an amphitheater. There's an entrance fee…"

"Got it. You can go back now," I said, interrupting them.

"Thank you, sir."

When the guide left, Jo Hye-Jin looked as if she couldn't believe it.

"You see?"

"…"

"There's nothing money can't buy. You can even buy experience here and that includes *illegal* experience," I said.

"…"

"Is there anything you've been wanting to try or wished someone else would do it for you or are there things you could only fantasize about in your head? I'll pay for it so why not find something?" I suggested.

"You…"

"I'm joking, of course," I quickly said.

I was sure what she wanted was to bring this entire place down.

When I continued walking without caring much about her, I saw the amphitheater the guide had mentioned earlier and it was a lot bigger than I thought. It felt like they had moved the old Colosseum underground. Some people were waiting in line to enter and others were talking amongst themselves. When I handed the gold I had prepared, one of the guides nodded and started guiding us.

“The VIP section,” I said.

“There will be an additional charge,” the guide replied.

“It doesn’t matter…”

“Okay…”

“Has the match started yet?” I asked.

“It’s currently breaktime. The next match will start in five minutes,” the guide answered.

“All right…”

When the guide left, Jo Hye-Jin immediately started talking. She seemed curious about what was going to happen in front of all of these people.

“Haruka, what kind of match…”

“I’m not sure… I told you it was my first time here, too. If a large monster comes out, it’s obvious what kind of match it’s going to be,” I replied.

“Are you saying they’re going to hunt here?” she asked.

“I don’t think it’s going to be that boring… Do you think people gathered here just to see an adventurer hunt for monsters?” I asked.

“Then…”

“You’ll see,” I told her.

We heard people shouting. Everyone didn’t scream that loud because they were trying to maintain their composure, but there were some who clapped quietly while others cheered. What caught my attention was that woman from earlier. It seemed like she was looking at me, so I tried to ignore her.

‘I’m sure she isn’t looking at me.’

I naturally lowered my head when I heard people shouting and saw a huge monster

inside the arena.

'It's big… '

I couldn't really describe the monster. Its head resembled a lizard, but it had six legs. The monster was drooling and it constantly roared to the point that I felt like I was going deaf. The audience that was watching quietly started cheering and naturally, people started appearing on the opposite side of the monster. I was sure they were the ones who were going to fight the monster. There were about 30 of them and they were ordinary people who didn't even have basic gear with them.

Seeing how there were short fighters, I guess the group was mixed with races that weren't valuable. They were probably trying to cater to the different types of audiences because I even saw a beautiful elf in the group and naturally, I used Mind's Eye to look at their stats. Of course, their stats weren't that great. There were a few within the group who had experience in fighting, but their experience wasn't enough to defeat this monster. In order to defeat a monster that big, a party of well-trained free city citizens was required, and to make things worse, they didn't even have proper weapons so there was no way they could take on that monster. After the chains that restrained the monster broke, the monster instantly charged toward the 30 participants. The humans who had lost the will to fight even before this match began started scattering and running all over the arena and then I heard people shouting.

"Hang in there!"

"Just hold on a bit longer!"

'I wonder if they made bets on those people.'

The sight of the monster crushing the humans so easily was so absurd that it was making me laugh. There was blood splattering everywhere, but no one in this arena was worried about them.

"*Kyahhhh!*"

"S-Save me!"

"Save me! *Ahhhh!*"

Some were banging on the door where they came from and others were pushing people aside to save themselves. It was a pretty dramatic scene, but the people here weren't interested in the documentary. To them, the participants' screams and cries for help were entertainment. I guess I wasn't that bad of a person yet because the scene looked more like a documentary to me. I felt uncomfortable when I saw that half of the people had already died.

'Tsk.'

Since I was feeling this way, I was certain Jo Hye-Jin was feeling worse than me because she was frowning when we were at the slave auction house. When I glanced over at her, what I saw was a sight to behold.

'Maybe this was a bit extreme… '

When I saw Jo Hye-Jin's eyes behind her mask, I noticed the anger in her eyes. When she bit down on her lips, blood started to flow out and there was even blood flowing out from her tightly clenched fists.

'This is a problem.'

"Don't do…"

"I know," she replied, interrupting me.

"Anything rash…" I said, finishing my sentence.

"I… know," she said.

Jo Hye-Jin said that she knew, but her actions were telling me that she didn't know that she was supposed to sit still. Naturally, I became anxious because she seemed like she was going to jump into the arena at any moment. When I grabbed her hand, I felt her shaking and during all of this, the others continued to yell. There were only five people remaining in the arena.

"P-Please save me."

"Save me, please!"

"Please! Someone… anyone, help!"

“I don’t want to die… *hnnnngh*…”

“I don’t want to die here like this… please… please…”

The participants’ desperate cry for help caused the audience to become angry and their screams drowned out their cries, but I guess Jo Hye-Jin heard their cries for help loud and clear.

Sh… shit… ’

I was starting to feel frustrated when I imagined her suddenly running toward the arena. If that happened, then it would be difficult for me to handle the situation. When she slowly got up, I grabbed her hand again, but as Castle Rock’s stubborn woman, she didn’t care about anything around her.

‘Maybe this irritated her a bit too much… ’

“Don’t do anything crazy,” I warned her.

“I know,” she said.

“If you jump in there, I’ll die too,” I added.

“…”

“Do you want to save them?” I asked.

It was a bit early, but this was the right thing to do.

“Think carefully. How do you think you can save them?” I asked.

The answer was already there, but the important part was whether she was going to say the answer or not. I continued to look at her and even though it was a bit late, she told me the conclusion she came to.

“I’ll…”

“…”

“Buy them,” she said, finishing her sentence.

“That’s right.”

CHAPTER 164
WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY (5)

"That's right," I said to Jo Hye-Jin.

I didn't think she'd catch on so fast, but it was only a matter of time before she witnessed what was going on here.

As soon as she raised her hand, the mercenaries went in and they sent spells at the monster while approaching the survivors. Some people in the audience frowned at the sudden situation, but the others felt excited by the sudden change.

Arrows and magic were landing on the monster and of course, some of the survivors were injured in the midst of it. It seemed like they were overdoing it to save the products we were buying, but the monster stopped moving not long after. In the end, they killed the monster because it had become unbridled.

I wished the mercenaries were more skilled, but it was already too late.

'I should pay for them too.'

Unlike me who was thinking about the payment I had to make, Jo Hye-Jin was mumbling while looking at the sight before her and it was obvious what she was thinking.

"This…"

She never imagined that it could be handled this easily.

"This…"

Even while mumbling, the audience started yelling.

"Kill it!"

"What are you doing? Kill it!"

“You think I paid money just to see this?!”

“Kill it! Kill it!”

‘Looks like I’ll be paying a lot of money.’

But it wasn’t a bad ending…

“Simple, right?” I asked her.

“…”

“That’s the way it is. The problem was easily solved because I have purchasing power, not because of the place we’re in, Yuka. It’s the same when we’re outside. The majority of the problems we have can be handled with this pretty thing called money,” I explained.

“That’s…”

“It’s probably going to be more expensive than you thought, so I’ll lend you money, Yuka,” I offered.

“…”

“It’s a gift for becoming friends with me,” I added.

Jo Hye-Jin looked at me quietly and while a guide was approaching us, she was probably calculating how much we would have to pay for the situation just now.

“How would you like to pay, sir?” the guide asked.

“How much is it?” I asked.

“Four servants survived and they’re worth 50 gold each. Since one of them is an elf, it’ll be 500 gold…”

“That’s not a problem,” I told them.

“The dead monster costs 10,000 gold,” they added.

“Alright.”

I knew that a dead monster would cost more than a dead servant, but Jo Hye-Jin didn’t seem to understand because she stared at the guide who brought the statement over in a daze.

“Additionally, using the mercenaries to save them is 600 gold and the cost for treating the wounded is added in as well,” the guide explained.

“I understand,” I said.

“40,000 gold is the total audience admission fee, 20,000 gold for other damages and the base cost is 50,000 gold, which brings you to a total of 121,250 gold, sir,” they said.

‘It’s more expensive than I thought.’

It was a large amount even for me, but Kasugano Yuno in the Free City of Celia would be able to handle the expense.

‘I’m sorry, Yuno.’

Even a large guild wouldn’t appreciate spending this much money at once, so I decided to write Kasugano Yuno a letter since I would have to repay her one day.

“I’ll process the statement,” I told the guide.

“Thank you, sir.”

“I’m sorry for the unexpected situation,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“It’s nothing,” I replied.

“It’s probably because I’m an enthusiast of other races, but seeing an elf die breaks my heart. Elves aren’t born to die, but I’ve never heard of them being the prey… Does the business not provide information about the show beforehand?” she asked.

“I apologize,” the guide said.

“I think it’ll be great if you created a pamphlet. *Tsk*,” she suggested, clicking her

tongue.

“We’ll provide you with a few extra elves as an apology,” the guide replied.

When I looked at Jo Hye-Jin, I saw her nodding slowly. It would be strange to decline since she could free the elves in pain.

“*Hm*, I accept. I want elves that have some combat skills, but I don’t want ones that are too educated. If your apology earlier was sincere, it’d be best to show your sincerity since we want to maintain a good relationship with this place,” Jo Hye-Jin warned.

“You don’t have to worry because our goal is to satisfy our customers. By the way, when will you be returning…” the guide asked.

“I’ll look around for now since I’m not in the greatest mood,” she answered.

“I apologize for our company's negligence in this matter,” the guide said, apologizing.

“It’s fine, I understand. We’ll be leaving now,” she told them.

“There will be a lot of good elves coming out in the central auction house today… If you’re interested…”

I was impressed by this place because they were trying to do business even at a time like this.

“Are there any special items other than that?” I asked.

“Various items such as a monster’s egg and high-quality epic-ranked items will be auctioned. There are also various works of art that are no longer available…”

“I’m not interested in art, but… did you say a monster’s egg just now?” I asked.

“Yes, it’s a special item that had been difficult to get,” the guide answered.

“It sounds exciting, but… we’ll visit the central auction house another time,” I said.

I wasn’t sure how great the item was that it was going to be shown in the central auction house, but leaving this place immediately was the right thing to do and Jo

Hye-Jin must have felt the same way.

What happened in the amphitheater must've been too much for her because she remained quiet when we left.

"So it was 50 gold," she said.

"What was?" I asked.

"The people that had just died were only worth 50 gold. Only… only… 50 gold…" she mumbled.

"They were more expensive than I thought, but I guess that wasn't the case for you, Yuka," I commented.

"That damned monster cost 10,000 gold," she cursed.

"Don't you think it's a reasonable price? I heard it's hard capturing those types of monsters… and I'm sure taking care of them is even more difficult. It's natural for monsters to be worth more than humans since they can take the monster's corpse apart and use its parts as catalysts for hundreds of gold," I explained.

"But I don't understand…" she said in a low voice.

"It doesn't matter if you understand or not because to them, what's important is that a monster is more expensive, Yuka," I told her.

"You…"

"I'm only telling you the facts, not my opinion and they're the ones who decided on the cost. You're free to be immersed in your emotions, but isn't it time for you to wake up to reality? Or are you more naive than I thought? Didn't you compromise with your so-called justice?" I asked.

"I… understand… I definitely understand, but…"

"You can't accept it?"

"You can… say that," she turned her head away.

Jo Hye-Jin looked like she was deep in her thoughts since she remained quiet and that was all that mattered to me. It would be a shame to leave after coming all this way, so when she entered the amphitheater again, there wasn't anything else that really irritated her because what she witnessed earlier still disgusted her.

A carriage was waiting for us when we left and even though the group of shuddering elves was looking at us, I didn't care.

'Five.'

The company didn't give us as much as I thought, but it wasn't bad. The elves who were completely bound looked at us with fear.

"Not bad," I commented.

"We hope you're satisfied," the guide said.

"We are and we'll be sure to visit again," I said.

"We hope you have a safe trip."

"Please place those elves in the carriage," I ordered.

"Okay…"

The scared elves got in the carriage after Jo Hye-Jin and me. As soon as the door closed, I saw her carefully reaching her hand out toward the elves.

"*Kyah!*"

They would obviously react that way because they saw Jo Hye-Jin as a crazy human instead of a courageous knight who saved them. She spoke to me while looking at the five trembling elves grouped together. "What… are you planning on doing with them?"

"Well… one of them is yours… but I'll have to think about it. We can't set them free on the way back to the castle, so we'll have to find a place to keep them safe. Sending them to the Blue Guild is probably the best," I suggested.

"You're not going to set them free?" she asked.

“Nothing will change if I set the elves free right now because they’ll be captured again and end up in the same situation as before. Do you think the elves will be able to go back to their forest when they can’t do anything?” I asked her.

“…”

“We have important matters to take care of, so it’s impossible right now. I’ll take them with me when I visit the Elf Kingdom. It won’t be so bad to visit once this is all over,” I told her.

“That’s… a relief,” she commented.

“I’m not that bad of a person, right?” I asked.

“I don’t want to answer that question,” she said, turning away.

“I’ll take your silence as you agreeing with me,” I said with a smile.

“Why did you bring me here?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“It’s up to you to find the reason because I just wanted to show you the results,” I replied.

“The… results?” she asked.

“Yes, the results. The result of your decision. The difference between what you did at Castle Rock and what you did today. Think about which was the right solution. Actually, you can think about it if you want, Miss Hye-Jin,” I explained.

“That’s…”

“We both saved them. Your *correct* choice saved them,” I added.

“I don’t necessarily agree…” she mumbled.

“The result says otherwise, but I’ll respect your opinion.”

Whether she wanted to accept it or not wasn’t important because the most important thing was that I managed to plant my idea in her head.

Bonds weren’t formed in a short period of time. It required both parties to exchange values and ideas and once they started to understand each other, bonds would form. Her ideas probably weren't going to influence me, but at least, I had to show that I understood her ideas because right now, all that mattered was that we understood each other.

“I don’t necessarily think that… but… I’m thankful… about today, sub guild master,” Jo Hye-Jin said in a low voice.

‘I was right.’

There wasn’t anything money couldn't buy.

CHAPTER 165
MONSTER WAVE (1)

"You'll first head to the Free City of Lindel and after spending time at our guild, we'll send you back to your homes," I told the elves.

"R-Really? Then…"

"You don't have to worry. If I wanted to harm you or defile you in the first place, I wouldn't have resorted to such a complicated method," I said.

"*Oh…"*

"And I wouldn't have saved you from the monster knowing that it would be a big loss for me. You'll immediately get a new identification card when you arrive and act as the Blue Guild's guests. You're free to roam as long as you don't wander outside the city and no humans will cause you trouble, but if you're too scared to go outside, you're free to spend time inside the guild," I explained.

"Thank you…"

"You should thank Miss Jo Hye-Jin here instead of me because she's the one that wanted to save you all," I told them.

"*Oh!* Thank you very much. I know our meeting was short, but thank you very much for taking care of us," an elf said.

"I promise you'll be able to return to your homes," she said, reassuring them.

"*Heuuuuk*…"

Seeing Jo Hye-Jin comforting the crying elves was a beautiful sight. It broke my heart knowing that I had to let go of the elves worth 120,000 gold, but this was the right thing to do because they were of no use. Their stats weren't bad, but they were no different from villagers since their potential was weak. They were just unlucky because the hunters had captured them while they were living their normal lives.

I had to send the elves back as soon as possible because Kasugano Yuno discovered that I obtained five elven slaves. As someone who called me master, this was a massive problem for her that she sent a letter saying she was going to head to Castle Rock.

The elves were still worried that I was going to sell them off somewhere so they quietly stared at me, but I was sure they would understand once we arrived at our destination.

“By the way, it’s probably best if you stay inside the carriage until we reach our destination. Staying inside a carriage that has the guild’s badge is safe, but that’s not the case when you step out,” I warned them.

“We understand, benefactor,” an elf said.

“I only did what was right, but I do feel bad for not saving the others. I apologize on behalf of all human beings,” I said.

“I-If…”

“If I see other elves, I’ll do my best to help them,” I told them.

“Thank you…”

“You should get going,” I suggested.

When the elves in the carriage thanked us once again, Jo Hye-Jin looked a bit relieved as she said goodbye.

“Are you relieved?” I asked.

“Not really,” she answered.

“Have you grown fond of them?”

“I have a little bit… even though it had been a short time,” she answered.

“You did everything you could as a human being. Not only did you save them, but you hid them in a high-class inn and the Blue Guild will protect them as well, so I think you did a lot for them,” I explained.

“I appreciate the favor, sub guild master,” she said.

“I didn’t do it for them and to be exact, you’re the one who helped them, Miss Hye-Jin. You might get rewarded later for saving the elves,” I said, correcting her.

“…”

Jo Hye-Jin looked kind of fed up.

Even though it wasn’t intentional, making the elves indebted to us wasn’t bad because they would eventually pay us back for our good deeds.

“Let’s go eat,” I suggested.

“Okay, sub guild master,” she replied.

As we exchanged several conversations, Jo Hye-Jin and I became close and even though she didn’t change dramatically like Sun Hee-Young or Jung Ha-Yan, we were starting to understand each other. I thought about what it would be like if I got closer to her, but since she wasn’t the dangerous or crazy woman the system had mentioned, it was going to be difficult to be liked by her or even more. Still, getting closer to her was the most important task and even though I still had a long way to go, the fact that she didn’t feel uncomfortable around me anymore was proof that we got closer.

‘Being friends is more than enough.’

Having a woman like Jo Hye-Jin as a friend was good enough.

‘She is kind of inflexible.’

Her personality was far from my ideal type.

“So… have you thought about it?” I asked her.

“About…”

“I’m sure you know what I’m talking about. We need to take care of it quickly before there are more victims,” I told her.

“I don’t understand…”

“Pardon?”

“Well, I believe they should be dealt with according to the law, but…”

“You don’t know if things will work out, right?” I asked, finishing her sentence.

“It’s embarrassing, but that’s right. There’s no guarantee that I won’t experience the same situation as before even after telling everyone,” she explained.

“You’re probably right, Miss Hye-Jin. Making a move without proper evidence will put you in the same situation as before,” I said in agreement.

Even while walking, Jo Hye-Jin spoke like a young woman wandering in search of herself, which meant we were close enough to ask about each other’s concerns. This was good for me because I could show her that there were different ways to live life.

“Do you no longer sympathize with the comrades you were in the tutorial dungeon with?” I asked.

“Right now, I don’t want to forgive them,” she replied.

It was natural for her to react that way since it had only been a few days since she witnessed that scene in the auction house.

“I never imagined they would do something like that, but… they were different from what I imagined so I'm a bit confused. Actually, I’m starting to doubt whether the people I knew were actually involved in all of that,” she explained.

“The environment usually changes people. I’m certain my relatives and your relatives on Earth won’t think we committed murder. It’s more like self-defense for them, but it’s true that we got our hands dirty. They disposed of one thing to get to a higher place and even if they don’t know how the elves or the monsters they captured are being used, it doesn’t erase their crimes,” I told her.

“You’re right and they should be punished. I’m telling you about how they should be punished, but I’m sure you want to handle it yourself…”

“Yes, because I take matters into my own hands,” I said.

“I did think about the same thing, but I wondered whether it was okay for a person to punish another person, and should I really be the one to punish them? Do I deserve to do that?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“Why do you think you don’t deserve to do it? The Small Stone Guild and the others have abused their powers and got the result they wanted. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is still my favorite proverb because you should be punished for your sins. It’s fine to think a lot about it, but don’t focus too much on it. Place your hand on your chest and tell me what you want to do, Miss Hye-Jin,” I told her.

Jo Hye-Jin looked at me quietly, but I knew what she was going to say.

‘Yeah… it’s natural for you to think that way, too.’

I was sure she wanted to kill everyone in that disgusting place through this conversation. As we continued exchanging values and ideas, not only was she unknowingly acknowledging my principle that you could resolve the majority of problems with money, she was getting influenced by it little by little.

The relationship I had with Jo Hye-Jin was different from Lee Ji-Hye’s. The system called the Black Swan Guild’s Lee Ji-Hye and me, a match made in heaven because our actions and values were similar and thanks to that, we had synergy and were twice as efficient when together. Meanwhile, Jo Hye-Jin may not be as efficient, but we could have synergy through our different opinions and values.

‘That’s what you call being harmonious.’

Naturally, I had the advantage because she was someone I could control. If I were to compare her to a car, she was the brakes and the dash cam. She was someone who could prevent accidents in advance, but she was also someone who could take care of an accident. Even after Kim Hyun-Sung’s kingdom expanded, Jo Hye-Jin would stand on the opposite side of me as my friend and would become the brakes that would activate whenever I wanted her to do so. If I wanted to have full control, I had to choose who should stand on the opposite side of me.

‘I look forward to working with you, Hye-Jin.’

We would be working together for a long time.

“I… I feel the same way, sub guild master,” she replied.

“Since society won’t handle it, we have to take matters into our own hands and that’s the first step in a revolution,” I explained.

“I don’t understand what you’re saying,” she mumbled.

“Simply driving them out won’t put an end to it because crime doesn’t just go away,” I told her.

“What…”

“Even though I haven’t lived long, I believe that creating a perfect society is impossible. There will always be crime wherever humans live and even if the Small Stone Guild disappears, there will be a second Small Stone Guild and a second amphitheater. And once they’re gone there will be another one to replace them because whenever there’s demand, there will be supply,” I explained.

“What do you…”

“I’m going to control the social issues,” I said.

“That’s a dangerous thought…” she commented.

“It’s better than standing by and doing nothing. After destroying the old, I’m going to build another tower on top of it. This goes for both Lindel and Castle Rock,” I added.

“How…”

“*How* is the question,” I said, smiling.

“Are you planning on purchasing the entire place?” she asked.

I couldn’t help but smirk because I never imagined that she would say that.

“No, I’m going to mow down everything so that not even a single weed exists,” I answered.

Of course, it was for my own benefit.

Jo Hye-Jin’s troubled face was telling me that she was thinking about how to accept my words and actions. She probably wasn’t going to stop me because what she

witnessed was simply too shocking for her to stop me with just her love for mankind. She may be expecting me to make a move, but the problem was I didn't have any power to mow them down. Still, if the situation was right, it could be possible.

'A monster wave is going to happen soon, too… '

Coincidentally, the person who had been tracking me from the beginning till the end knew exactly where I had been even though Jo Hye-Jin and I didn't know where the auction house was located…

'Ha-Yan, you're checking in, right?'

Being stalked by an archmage was more helpful than I thought.

CHAPTER 166
MONSTER WAVE (2)

'Right Ha-Yan?'

It was true that I had been worried about the tracking device on me, but it would most likely remain undetected since not even the magic scholar Hwang Jung-Yeon detected the spell. A tracking spell made using a catalyst still hadn't been introduced to the continent and Jung Ha-Yan was becoming more clever as she kept getting stronger, so unless an archmage was with me at all times, it would be difficult to detect the spell. We did pass through a magic freeze zone, but the tracking device probably wasn't going to stop working just because of that.

I was truly looking forward to the data Kim Hyun-Sung was going to bring, but there was a reason why I was desperately waiting for Jung Ha-Yan. The puzzle was nearly complete. The reason why I wasn't able to move on to the next step was that the party that went on the expedition had the last piece of the puzzle and all I could do was wait for them.

'When are you guys coming back?'

The big event that was going to take place in the city was my golden opportunity and I was getting impatient. Since I had nothing else to do, I could only talk with Lady Marilyn or Jo Hye-Jin, or manage the guilds that signed the contract with us. Of course, I was managing the key figures, like Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild. He continued to show his affection for Lady Marilyn, but it seemed like it wasn't going well. Even though he was pledging his loyalty to me right now, when I considered his unique habit, it was quite possible that he was planning on using Lady Marilyn to backstab me.

'I would want to backstab me, too… '

It seemed like I was preventing him from becoming a noble, but even if I wasn't here, there was no guarantee that Lady Marilyn would pick him.

'It's none of my business.'

More importantly, Song Jung-Wook still had business with me, but I no longer needed him so there was no need for me to continue supporting him.

'I also have Hye-Jin to take care of… '

It would be a waste to keep using my time on him.

Before the expedition party came back, I would exchange letters with the Blue Guild's strategic planning team, discussed defense systems and siege warfare with Castlerock, and even discussed these matters with Jo Hye-Jin because she was more knowledgeable than I in this field. In the case that a monster wave did happen, I would organize Castle Rock's military, so I had to constantly check the supplies and their quantities.

Finally, the expedition party returned.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung just came back."

"Thank you for coming all this way to tell me, Lady Marilyn," I said.

"I-It's nothing. I only did what was right," she stuttered.

"I'll be right back, Lady Marilyn."

"Okay…"

It may seem like a simple hunt to others, but their return meant a lot to me because Kim Hyun-Sung sounded like he wasn't going to return until he had found enough clues, but since he had come back, it meant things were going to change in Castle Rock.

'Good, good.'

When I walked out, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung and the rest of the members. Jung Ha-Yan was running toward me while Park Deok-Gu was waving. Kim Ye-Ri, Sun Hee-Young, and Hwang Jung-Yeon's tired faces made me realize that the expedition had been a difficult one.

"Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

"*Oh,* Ha-Yan. Have you been doing well?" I asked.

"Yes, I-I've been doing well," she answered.

"Did anything happen?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not sure if this is worth mentioning, but it seems like what the dude said last time was true," Park Deok-Gu answered.

"What he said last time?" I asked.

"You know, the monster wave or whatever," he replied.

'They found something.'

"Is what Deok-Gu said true?" I asked Kim Hyun-Sung.

"Yes, Mr. Ki-Young. I think it'll be best to tell you the details later," he replied.

"So it really was true," I commented.

'Of course, it should be true… '

"It was kind of difficult to tell all this time, but we found a clue through this expedition. I think I should meet with Count Castlerock about this first and then directly head to the office when I'm done. Maybe…"

"Yes, I'll join you in a bit," I said, finishing his sentence.

"All right…"

There was probably going to be a meeting sooner or later, so I decided to spend the remaining time with Ha-Yan.

"Ha-Yan, let's talk," I told her.

"*Oh…* okay!" she replied excitedly.

"Miss Hee-Young and Miss Jung-Yeon, I know you just got back, but please check the supplies and place an order for the items we need from Lindel. Miss Hye-Jin should

know the details," I told them.

"Okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

When I left, Jung Ha-Yan followed me and even though she didn't know what our talk would be about, she seemed happy just by the fact that I wanted to talk to her. Seeing her grab my hand with a bright smile made me smile as well.

'How should I tell her?'

Right now, Jung Ha-Yan had no idea that I knew her secret. Since it wouldn't be good to hide the fact that I knew about it, I thought it would be best to bring it up when she was in a good mood. When I waved to her after opening the door to my room, she ran like a child getting presents on Christmas. I didn't know what she was expecting, but her face turned slightly red.

"Come in," I told her.

"Okay, oppa."

I heard a click after Jung Ha-Yan entered.

'Why did she lock the door?'

I had no idea what she was thinking, but the way she quietly sat down after I patted the seat to me made her look funny. She looked up at me and said, "W-Why did you call for me?"

"I have a question."

"A-A question?" she asked.

"Yeah. Well… do you…"

"Yes?"

"You're not hiding anything from me, right?" I asked her.

"Yes!" she instantly replied.

I started to panic when she lied so confidently so I decided to be more straightforward.

“I really need to know, Ha-Yan. You know where I went when you left for the expedition, right?” I asked.

“Excuse me?”

“On the day you left for the expedition with the others, you know where I went. Isn’t that true?” I asked again.

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about. How could I…” she stuttered.

“You know I’m not trying to blame you, Ha-Yan,” I said to reassure her.

“I-I’m not sure…” she said.

It must’ve been difficult for her to look at me when I stared at her because she quietly turned her head away. Basically, she couldn’t look at me because she wasn’t a good liar.

“I already know everything, so you can tell me comfortably. I’m not trying to question you. I’m asking because I genuinely want to know,” I told her.

“I-I don’t know. R-Really…” she mumbled.

‘It’s obvious… ’

Jung Ha-Yan was obviously lying because she was doing her best to hide it. I decided to pressure her even more because otherwise, there wouldn’t be an end to this.

“Ha-Yan.”

“Y-Yes?”

“I hate liars the most,” I said.

“*Oh…*”

“I don’t care about everything else, but I really hate liars,” I told her again.

“Th-That’s…”

I wanted to end the useless fight here, but I couldn’t help but pity her when she started trembling. She started crying like a child who had been caught lying to her mother.

“*Hiccup*.”

She even started hiccuping…

“*Hiccup*.”

I knew she was going to be kind of scared of me, but her reaction was worse than I thought.

“*Hiccup*.”

“You know where I went, right?” I asked again.

“…”

“I knew a long time ago that you used a tracking magic spell on me, Ha-Yan,” I told her.

“…”

“One, two…”

“It’s true,” she said.

When I spoke in a slightly threatening tone, she dropped her head in defeat. Seeing her tears streaming down her cheeks broke my heart a little, but her reaction was kind of fun to watch. I wanted to tease her a bit more, but asking about the situation was more important so I patted her head while talking. “I’m not mad at you, so don’t worry. I didn’t like it at first, but I know you did it all for me, right?” I asked.

“Y-Yes!” she exclaimed.

“You used that spell in case I was in danger, right?” I asked.

“Yes… a little…” she answered.

“You were worried that I was going to get attacked,” I added.

“Th-That’s right,” she said.

“The way you did it was wrong, but I can understand because you did it all for me,” I told her.

“*Oh…*”

‘It’s actually helpful… ’

Her tracking spell was the most reliable insurance for me since outside threats could harm me at any time due to my poor stats.

‘It can be used when I get kidnapped… and I can use it in situations like this.’

There will be a problem regarding my privacy, but it was fine for safety reasons.

“It’s okay as long as you don’t lie. Of course, I’m not saying what you did was right. You know what you did was wrong, right?” I asked.

“Yes… Oppa,” she replied.

“I’m not trying to scold you so stop crying,” I told her.

“Okay!”

“Alright, let’s look at the map together,” I suggested.

“Yes, Oppa!”

Jung Ha-Yan seemed relieved because she thought she was going to get scolded, but the situation ended smoothly. She probably realized she was being helpful and seeing her being happy made me think for a moment whether it was okay to just let it end like this, but since I pointed out what she did wrong, I thought it was fine.

‘She won’t lie from now on… ’

Of course, I couldn't say that for sure though.

"Can you point it out on the map?" I asked.

"I-I don't know the exact location because I don't know much about Castle Rock's geography," she said.

"It's okay."

"I'm certain it was about 500 meters to the left from here…"

Despite not knowing the exact location, it was scary how she knew the exact route I took. I thought it was really like her to explain her stalking methods with a smile while her face was covered in tears.

'She's really… '

"There was a magic freeze zone here, but the spell I used on you won't be affected by it because I upgraded it… *hehe*," she explained with a chuckle.

"*Oh…* I see…"

"It's strange because this area is blocked. I'm certain you went this way… and… after stopping here, you went underground," she explained.

"Don't worry about the blocked path and keep showing me where I went," I told her.

"All right."

"From here, you went here…"

"Okay…"

"And then here…"

"Yes…"

"And then here!"

I couldn't help but smile when her soft finger pointed at a special location.

'It was within the city.'

CHAPTER 167
MONSTER WAVE (3)

'It was within the city… '

Since it was inside the city, it would make it easier for me to move around.

'The western region… '

Other than the fact that the Castle Rock's nobles lived there, there wasn't anything special about that region. Having a large underground site was difficult to imagine, but since Jung Ha-Yan confidently pointed to that area, I knew it was there.

"You're sure, right?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm sure!" she exclaimed.

"*Mmhm*, okay, thanks Ha-Yan," I said.

"*Hehehe*."

'I think it'll be fine… '

The location wasn't bad; even if it got mowed down, it wouldn't matter.

'It's far from the castle as well… '

Seeing as how it was on the other side of the shrine, it wouldn't matter even if that region disappeared from the map.

'It's not bad… '

Jung Ha-Yan looked at me while I was thinking and since I handled one major task, it was time for me to go to the meeting.

"Good job, Ha-Yan," I said, complimenting her.

“Thank you!”

“I’ll see you later,” I said.

“*Oh…* okay,” she replied disappointingly.

I personally enjoyed puzzles, so matching another piece with the other made me feel good. Castle Rock’s situation was changing every moment even if I wasn’t doing anything.

When I left after patting Jung Ha-Yan’s head, I heard the news that Count Castlerock had summoned all the guild and clan masters, which improved my mood even further. It wasn’t exactly like a draft, but as free city citizens who lived in Castle Rock and within the Holy Empire, it was our duty to fight for the Empire. I was certain the same would’ve happened if we were within the Holy Empire.

‘It’s a really good situation.’

The Blue Guild brought the news that the city was in danger and if I had to explain it, we would be in a good position before and after the monster wave.

When I walked into the meeting, Count Castlerock and Kim Hyun-Sung were having a serious conversation, but I was honestly happy about it.

“Is that true?” the count asked.

“I’m sure of it. I’ve seen many signs within the forest,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“This hasn’t happened in decades…” the count commented.

When I quietly joined them, they looked at me.

“Danger usually comes suddenly without a warning, so we should make preparations,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

My role here was to support Kim Hyun-Sung because not many people would believe his sudden warning, but if the honorary bishop said it, it would be convincing. When I sat next to him, he thanked me by nodding, and as he continued talking, I felt proud of every word he spoke.

“As I’ve mentioned earlier, the signs keep coming and we saw those signs ourselves when we went hunting recently. The signs are very similar to the signs seen in the cities that had already experienced a monster wave,” he told the count.

‘It’s a monster wave.’

“The silence is strange and the majority of the monsters’ ecology is abnormal,” he added.

“It certainly seems that way. It’s strange that the monsters are moving out of their territory… I think it’ll be best if we hold a meeting and come up with a solution,” Count Castlerock said.

“If you want a solution, I organized some data,” I said.

“*Oh,* Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

“I’m certain Castle Rock has its own manual in dealing with different situations, but I personally prepared data for this. The reason why the Blue Guild came here was that we received news of strange signs in the monsters’ forest,” I explained.

“Excuse me? I haven’t heard of that news…”

Of course, he hadn’t heard of it because I made it up.

“It’s understandable that you haven’t heard of it since it hasn’t spread amongst the free city citizens, Count Castlerock. It’s a bit embarrassing to say this as a free city citizen, but there’s a lot of people who don't like the situation,” I said.

“I think I understand what you’re saying,” the count said, nodding.

“Despite living in the land of the Holy Empire, there are many that demand freedom, but are unwilling to assume responsibility for their duties and rights. Actually, I’m certain it’s the majority. The free city citizens aren’t happy about getting drafted and there will be others that’ll question why they need to fight for Castle Rock,” I explained.

“…”

“When the wave happens, the majority of them will run away,” I added.

What I said just now wasn't a lie and since Count Castlerock wasn't an idiot, I was sure he understood what I was trying to say.

"We must declare martial law and close the gates. We need to create units and prepare to enter a state of war," I said.

'We can't let those bastards from the auction house run away.'

No matter what, we must not let them leave with the items they had.

'That's all money… '

Not only that, but we also need to stop the bastards that would try to run away.

"I'm worried that the citizens will become uneasy, but you do have a point," the count said in agreement.

"It's natural for them to feel that way; no, they had to feel uneasy," I said.

Before I could finish, the guild and clan masters started entering. I had personally met each and every one of them after Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild introduced me to them. After recalling what I said earlier, Count Castlerock didn't seem to like them anymore.

"Please have a seat," the count said, gesturing.

"Yes, sir."

"It has been a while, Count Castlerock."

"*Ahem*."

The guild and clan masters looked puzzled because of the serious atmosphere and when Song Jung-Wook looked at me as if asking what was going on, I smiled and waved. He returned the gesture and also smiled like an idiot. He already knew that as the honorary bishop, I was close to Count Castlerock and since he was close to me, he thought he would either gain benefits from this meeting or be protected if something happened.

'How cute.'

I wasn't sure if Song Jung-Wook was quick-witted or slow because even though he knew something must have happened, it didn't seem like he thought about what would happen to him.

After sitting down with Kim Hyun-Sung, Count Castlerock started talking after a moment of silence. Even though we had a short conversation, he delivered the conversation we had earlier. It was up to Count Castlerock on what he wanted to do, but I thought maybe Marilyn's father would take my advice.

'Right?'

If the meeting ended after telling them that there was going to be a monster wave, I was certain those bastards would run away and as the count who had to protect the people of this land, he couldn't allow that. As such, he should accept my suggestion.

"Starting now, Castle Rock will declare martial law to prepare for war," the count announced.

'Nice.'

"We believe there will be a monster wave within a month. I'll request help from other cities, but after closing the entrance, the free city citizen soldiers within Castle Rock will unite with the forces of the castle and work together," he added.

"What the…"

Everyone looked dumbfounded, but a few frowned at the sudden situation.

"A monster wave?"

"Where… did you get that information…"

Kim Hyun-Sung answered their bullshit.

"The Blue Guild investigated it."

"A-Are you certain?"

"I'll explain again during our briefing, but yes, it's true," he replied, nodding.

I could understand why they would groan and become anxious at the sudden news that they were going to fight against monsters. On top of that, they had to join the castle knights and fight which made them even more apprehensive.

'Tsk.'

I thought the guild masters were going to complain, but after seeing the determined count, they remained quiet. But all of a sudden, Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild spoke, "Count Castlerock."

"What is it, master of the Small Stone Guild?" the count asked.

"I understand why we're declaring martial law to prepare for war, but joining the castle to fight is a bit…"

"Is there a problem?" he asked.

"I'm certain it won't be efficient. According to Imperial Law, when a dangerous situation similar to war occurs, guilds and clans operate as independent units, so for us to operate with the castle is…"

"No. To be exact, under the Imperial Law, the supreme commander can change the formation of the troops at their own discretion, so we won't be breaking any laws," the count interrupted.

"But…"

The others started to complain as well.

"If that's the case, please reconsider your decision. As free city citizens living in Castle Rock, we understand that we must fight when the city is threatened, but…" Song Jung-Wook said.

"Are you saying there will be a problem fighting with the castle knights?" the count asked, interrupting him once more.

"That's not what I meant. All I'm saying is that free city citizens have their own way of handling things. Please make a more reasonable decision," he requested.

"The ways of the free city citizens… I don't understand what you're saying. What

exactly is that method of yours? Is it using the citizens of Castle Rock so that you can survive?" the count asked bluntly.

"That's not true, Count Castlerock. I believe a free city citizen should manage the free citizen troops…"

"So you're saying that you're going to manage the troops yourself, right?" he asked, cutting off Song Jung-Wook.

"No, that's not…"

"If that's not it, then what is it, master of the Small Stone Guild? I'm not an idiot. I know why you're staying in Castle Rock and why you want an independent unit. I also know that you're not willing to risk your life for this city," the count directly said.

"That's definitely not true, but the situation…"

This argument wasn't helping either of them because the relationship between the free city citizens and the residents of this city was symbiotic.

'It'll break if it's too strong.'

They needed to compromise even if they didn't like it, but that was when I heard Count Castlerock's voice. "If that's the case, I'll leave it up to Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

'Jackpot!'

The free citizens weren't happy about this arrangement because I was a guest. A few of the guild masters started to speak against me.

"But Mr. Lee Ki-Young isn't originally from Castle Rock."

"This is a compromise I'm willing to make," the count said.

"That's fine…"

Surprisingly, Song Jung-Wook agreed so when I glanced over at him, I saw him smiling.

'This bastard… '

He was trying his best to dig a hole where he could survive, but he had no idea that hole was going to be his grave.

'You're going to be in the front line no matter what, Jung-Wook… '

It had been decided long ago.

CHAPTER 168
MONSTER WAVE (4)

'No matter what you do, you're going to be in the front line, Jung-Wook… '

I knew that there was a difference between fighting together with the castle knights and managing militia units. For Song Jung-Wook, this was a matter of survival, and the only reason why he agreed to Count Castlerock's suggestion was that he thought I would place the Small Stone Guild at a suitable location. Probably…

'…Somewhere in the back.'

Count Castlerock had already made up his mind by declaring martial law and preventing the free city citizens from fleeing the city. He also knew that things would feel out of place if he volunteered to lead the efforts himself, but if the honorary bishop took charge, that would be entirely different. To the Small Stone Guild, choosing me as the guild's shield appeared to be a great choice, but it was their mistake for misunderstanding my intentions. Song Jung-Wook had to be thinking that I still cared about him, because he desperately started agreeing with the count, and naturally, the other guild masters supported him.

"Even if the guilds and clans work independently, we still need someone to lead us, and even though Mr. Lee Ki-Young isn't from Castle Rock, he's still a citizen of the Holy Empire," Song Jung-Wook said.

"*Hm*…"

"I think it'll be fine."

"We did consider it…"

The other masters started talking.

"Maybe…"

"Giving Mr. Lee Ki-Young the commander position is…"

When some of the guilds started agreeing, the other guilds and clans joined in because they realized that they could benefit from this. It only took a moment for them to change their minds, and the way they tried to impress me made them look like cute puppies.

'The count has come up with a great idea.'

Using draconic regulations to control the free city citizens would help avert the crisis temporarily, but it wouldn't be a wise choice in the long run, because both sides had to compromise. The compromise was me, because I could connect the count and the free city citizens together.

'It's reasonable.'

I couldn't trust any of the free city citizens within Castle Rock, and I wasn't sure whether it was because of Lady Marilyn or my sincerity in trying to protect the city, but the count seemed to trust me before I had even realized it.

'It's understandable considering the rumors that are spreading about me in the castle.'

The honorary bishop Lee Ki-Young had a good reputation.

Our regressor also seemed satisfied by this situation, because as long as there was someone who had a stable grip on the troops, he could run around more comfortably.

'It's also good for me, too.'

"It's… a bit too much for me," I said.

"Don't worry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I'll support you with everything I have," Song Jung-Wook said, reassuring me.

"If you say so, *ahem*," I said.

I actually wanted to try and command a large troop because I had only read theories about it. I would be an idiot to let this opportunity go to waste, but it was the virtue of a Korean to be modest. People looked at me when I mentioned I was lacking, but they agreed that I should take an important position.

'Nice… '

"If that's what you want… I'll do my best to collaborate with Castle Rock, organize and operate the units. I look forward to working with you, Count Castlerock," I said.

"I look forward to working with you, too, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," the count said, nodding.

It felt like things were settling down now, but when I saw the people looking at me, I realized that I had a lot to do, since forming units was *that* important.

'Who'd want to go to the first wall?'

I had already decided who was going to go there, but I still needed to think about it.

During the briefing, the others were probably thinking about how they could avoid going to the first wall. Even though they were questioning whether the monster wave would really come or not, Kim Hyun-Sung did an excellent job at answering their questions.

"I'm sure the people who went hunting recently noticed that the monsters currently living in the forest in front of Castle Rock look abnormal."

"I've… definitely felt it. The basilisk that usually lives in swamps suddenly started appearing in the forest, and even the higher-ranked monsters have started appearing on the outskirts of the forest. Our clan even stopped the new members from going out to hunt."

"If you compare the signs of the monster wave Castle Rock had experienced decades ago, you can see that it's extremely similar," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Why?"

"It could be an oversaturation of the population or there could be a new monster that's threatening the existing monsters by moving its habitat," he replied.

"But can you consider that as a sign of a monster wave? I think we can apply martial law or enter a state of war once we have clear evidence…"

"It'll be too late. There's a difference between preparing while knowing and preparing without knowing. If you also look at the graph…"

"*Ugh*… I see."

This was the type of conversation they had, so I didn't need to join in. I was sure they felt that the data we had provided was lacking, but all the evidence showed that *something* was going to happen. A few doubtful people complained about the war; they didn't want to acknowledge it and were even suspicious of me. We didn't need evidence to know that a monster wave was coming, because the wave had already happened in Kim Hyun-Sung's past life. But the reason for the monster wave was still unclear, and it seemed that even Kim Hyun-Sung had no idea about it, too.

' It doesn't really matter… '

We only had one job—to kill the monsters.

People started talking after the briefing, and as the commander, I thought I should say something to those who were still confused. "As the commander, I have a request. I would like each guild and clan to submit a report regarding their organization's structure and unit composition. Please be accurate and make sure not to hide anything, so that I can put together a reasonable arrangement."

"What?"

"We'll unify the supplies of the guilds and also integrate the supplies we brought over from the Blue Guild," I added.

"That's…"

"Lindel will also provide support. The supplies arriving from Lindel will be added to the list, so I ask for your cooperation. I plan on putting Castle Rock's merchant guild in charge of managing the supplies, and once all of this is over, I plan on distributing the remaining supplies in a reasonable way, so please don't worry," I explained.

"But… each guild and group have their own situation they're dealing with…"

"This is the list of supplies the Blue Guild will provide for free, and I'm certain it's more than what the few mid-sized guilds possess. I'd like to take into consideration the situation each guild is going through, but I didn't accept this position for your convenience. Of course, I'll take your situation into account to some extent, but if you don't plan on following me, it's best if you fight under Castle Rock's command," I warned them.

“It’s not that we won’t follow you…”

Having control over their supplies was the first thing to do when controlling these idiots. Song Jung-Wook nodded and spoke to me. “I completely agree with you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

His pledge of loyalty came out of nowhere, but it wasn’t disadvantageous for me.

“Only the minimum number of troops will be left in the guild. For the time being, all guilds will use the barracks inside the castle and have members on standby on top of the walls at all times. Additionally, everyone will start their training tomorrow, and the members of the Red Mercenary Guild will help with your training as well,” I explained.

“Is the Red Mercenary Guild coming as well?”

They sounded hopeful.

“We’re currently talking with Lindel, and if the timing is right, Miss Cha Hee-Ra will be fighting with us,” I answered.

“*Ooooh*.”

They became less anxious when I mentioned the Red Mercenary Guild, because they thought that having them here would make the situation easier, or that they could overcome the monster wave. I felt that they were starting to admire me even more, and it was probably because of Cha Hee-Ra. Of course, they liked me from the start, because I was their commander. What I had been doing so far was carrying out Kim Hyun-Sung’s plan when he suggested we go to Castle Rock, but at times like this, a commander’s confidence would give confidence to ignorant people like them. I was basically telling them that they would obtain benefits if they followed me.

“*Hahaha*. You have no idea how relieved I am that you’re here, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

During all of this, Song Jung-Wook didn’t stop complimenting me, because he wanted to be placed in the back.

“After Castle Rock’s merchant guild receives all the supplies today, they’ll look through them and sort them. The other guilds should arm themselves and move to the barracks,” I ordered.

“Within one day?”

“Yes, within one day,” I replied.

“Looks like we’ll be busy.”

“If you run into any problems, please report it to me directly,” I ordered.

“Understood…”

“Which barracks should we go to?”

“Everything will be prepared when you go there,” I replied.

I had to give them time to prepare, and when I spoke as if everything had already been prepared, they looked at me as if they were relieved that I became the commander.

‘That’s what I wanted.’

I could request help from the priests of other cities since I was the honorary bishop, and since I was the Mercenary Queen’s lover, I could also ask the Red Mercenary Guild for help. If I could get help from the Yozora Guild as well, I was sure that the people here would see me as a competent commander.

“I’ll discuss with Count Castlerock and come up with the layout of the units as soon as possible. You’re dismissed. Please take care of your personal affairs as quickly as possible, since we’re under martial law right now. I don’t like unnecessary conflict, so as long as you follow me, you’ll all benefit from it,” I told them.

“*Ah…*”

“Don’t just think about the monster wave, but also what’ll happen after,” I added.

“I understand.”

When I stood up and went outside, the soldiers followed, and out of all of them, the most enthusiastic person was Song Jung-Wook, the one who had given me this position.

“What time should we be here, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” he asked.

“I’d like it if everyone gathered in the afternoon, but…”

“I think it’ll take some time…” he pointed out.

“In that case, I’ll give everyone more time,” I said.

“*Hahaha*. Thank you.”

“It’s fine. I don’t want to be inflexible,” I told him.

“As expected from you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I knew you were going to be the light of Castle Rock when you first arrived here. *Hahaha*,” he complimented me.

With Song Jung-Wook as their model, the others also started to compliment me and make flattering comments. It took me quite some time to lose them, so my plan to talk to Jung Ha-Yan about the tracking spell on my body was delayed for a bit.

‘I need to organize the troops as well… ’

It wasn’t a big deal, because I had the smart Jo Hye-Jin, who could do it for me.

“Miss Hye-Jin?”

“Yes, Sub-guildmaster.”

“I have other matters I need to take care of, so I think you should form the troops, Miss Hye-Jin,” I told her.

“Excuse me?” she asked, dumbfounded.

“For the first wall, include Song Jung-Wook of the Small Stone Guild and whoever else you think should be there,” I instructed her.

“*Oh…*”

“Shouldn’t they be punished for their sins?” I asked.

Song Jung-Wook would *definitely* be shocked by this arrangement.

CHAPTER 169
BETRAYAL OF TRUST (1)

"Excuse me, Master. Are you sure about this?"

"About what?" Song Jung-Wook[1] asked.

"About Lee Ki-Young of the Blue Guild taking command…"

"*Oh,* don't worry about that," Song Jung-Wook replied.

"What? But… your plan…"

"We need to take care of what's in front of us first. Lee Ki-Young is from Lindel and even if his influence over Castle Rock expands, there's a limit to what he can do. Actually, it'll be better for us, since we still have a lot to benefit from him," he explained.

"*Ah…"*

"Lee Ki-Young knows exactly what 'give and take' means… *hehehe*."

Despite his bad first impression of Lee Ki-Young, the latter had turned out to be the type of person who always brought surprises. At first, he had thought Lee Ki-Young was just lucky and that he had simply obtained his position by being the Mercenary Queen's lover, but as time passed, Song Jung-Wook realized that wasn't the case. Even though Song Jung-Wook was curious about how Lee Ki-Young had gotten so much power, it was more important to know the latter's attitude and how he was going to use that power.

'He knows… '

Lee Ki-Young knew better than anyone how to use his power and position because not long after he had arrived in Castle Rock, he had become acquainted with the masters of mid-sized clans.

'Of course, it was through me… '

The fact that Lee Ki-Young had visited Song Jung-Wook first showed what kind of person he was, and it was a bit funny to say this, but Song Jung-Wook somewhat respected Lee Ki-Young. Efficiency was the most important, and after bringing people to his side, Lee Ki-Young rewarded them for their loyalty and made them realize how helpful they were. The result was obvious. Castle Rock had changed to the point that there were even matters they couldn't discuss without him, and that included the economy, politics, and even trivial matters.

'It's all about skills.'

While Song Jung-Wook was thinking, Park Ga-Eul, his adjutant, spoke, "Master, I understand what you're thinking, but I'm kind of worried…"

"No need to worry," Song Jung-Wook interrupted.

"Okay…"

"I'm not as dumb as you think. From what I heard, he doesn't have a good relationship with Jo Hye-Jin. So what does this all mean? "Song Jung-Wook asked.

"*Uh…"*

"It means Lee Ki-Young is the same as us. The business the Blue Guild is doing is borderline illegal and the contract we made wasn't exactly *legal* either. He basically forced it on me," Song Jung-Wook explained.

"Yes, he did…" Park Ga-Eul mumbled.

"Based on the rumors, it seems like he doesn't have a conscience, which makes him the same as us, not Jo Hye-Jin. I decided that we should maintain a closer relationship with him, so that basically says it all," Song Jung-Wook added.

"Master… you're not thinking about telling him about our business, right?" Park Ga-Eul asked.

"No…"

"*Whew…"*

“It’s still too early,” Song Jung-Wook remarked.

“S-So… you’re going to tell him eventually?” Park Ga-Eul asked once more.

“The more I think about it, the more I think it’s not a bad idea, because I’m sure we’ll benefit from him joining. Can you imagine what Lee Ki-Young will look like when he enters the underground? We can grow more and take full control of the amphitheater. It’ll be our chance to get back at those who looked down on the Small Stone Guild,” Song Jung-Wook explained.

“You have a point, but I feel kind of nervous. I keep thinking that it’s not a good idea to be so close to him…” Park Ga-Eul said, worried.

“*Ah*, I’m being cautious, so don’t worry so much. *Ahem*. Let’s continue what we’ve been doing and who knows? Lee Ki-Young might hand over Marilyn to me… As long as we pretend to be loyal to him, we’ll always benefit from it. I’m taking care of it, so don’t worry, Ga-Eul,” Song Jung-Wook said in a reassuring tone.

“…”

“I was worried when he said we were going to live at the walls, but it’s nice to have connections,” Song Jung-Wook said.

The room was so big that it couldn’t be called the barracks, and it was more comfortable than the room Song Jung-Wook was currently staying in in the barrack. Due to Castle Rock being under martial law, Song Jung-Wook couldn’t bask in luxury, but he was still living a decent life. Lee Ki-Young was obviously being considerate of him.

“Just look at the room we’re in; you’ll know how important I am to him. I can understand why he feels that way—he needs me too, *hehe,*” Song Jung-Wook chuckled.

“I see,” Park Ga-Eul said, nodding.

“By the way, is there something wrong, Park Ga-Eul?” Song Jung-Wook asked.

“It’s nothing,” they answered.

“Do you have any complaints?” Song Jung-Wook asked once more.

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s just everything seems to be working too smoothly…” they said.

“There’s no need for you to worry,” Song Jung-Wook said once again.

“That man…”

“What?” Song Jung-Wook asked.

“I feel something sinister from him… Of course, it’s just my feeling, but… I feel like you won’t benefit from anything by being involved with him,” Park Ga-Eul answered.

“*Tsk*. You’re too cautious,” Song Jung-Wook clicked his tongue.

“I’m sorry, Master,” they apologized.

“There’s nothing to apologize for, I like that about you. Of course, it’s a bit overboard to trust a crazy bastard that had just appeared here, but I heard something from Lee Ki-Young when I drank with him last time,” Song Jung-Wook said.

“What?”

“He doesn’t like to gamble but is willing to if necessary,” Song Jung-Wook answered.

“*Ah.*”

“*Mmm*… When I heard that, I knew he was going to be successful, and even though he’s younger than me, I could still learn a thing or two from him. He also has qualities I respect. I don’t like to gamble either, but my guts are telling me that this is the time to throw the dice,” Song Jung-Wook explained.

“I see…” they said.

“I understand that you’re worried, but it’s not good to cower all the time. What do you think the difference is between me and him? Look at the things he has accomplished. Can you believe that Lee Ki-Young has only been here for a year? Of course, one of the reasons is that he’s close to the Mercenary Queen, but I’m certain there’s a difference between him and us,” Song Jung-Wook added.

“What kind of difference?”

“Whenever we need to make a choice, I don’t throw the dice, while Lee Ki-Young does, and that’s the reason why I’m being hesitant in Castle Rock, while Lee Ki-Young is controlling Lindel. Do you understand?” Song Jung-Wook said to Park Ga-Eul.

“Of course, Master…”

“You can’t gain anything if you don’t bet anything. *Ah,* that’s something he said, too. It sounds like he’s telling me to follow him. *Ahem*. Anyways, it’s almost time for the meeting, so I should head out. By the way… the supplies are properly stored, right?” Song Jung-Wook asked.

“Yes, Master. We stored them in the guild’s warehouse,” Park Ga-Eul answered.

“And the egg?” Song Jung-Wook asked once more.

“We’ve been taking good care of it, so don’t worry.”

“That’s good. Once this is over, I’ll have a chance. Pay attention to what’s happening outside because we need to work harder at times like this. Make sure to keep everyone in check,” Song Jung-Wook instructed.

“Understood…”

When Song Jung-Wook stepped outside, he saw knights, his guild members, and people wearing the Red Mercenary Guild’s badge patrolling from the top of the wall, but a red-headed woman caught his attention.

‘Cha Hee-Ra?’

Lee Ki-Young had mentioned getting help from the Red Mercenary Guild, but Song Jung-Wook didn’t think they would actually come. After the first meeting, Song Jung-Wook recalled seeing her riding a griffon. A strong body and aura, this was exactly what Song Jung-Wook had heard about the Mercenary Queen when he was out drinking. There was no need for other words—simply looking at her made his heart race.

‘They must have known each other since way back on Earth.’

If someone asked Song Jung-Wook if he was jealous, he would say that he was. Not only was the Mercenary Queen strong, but she was also beautiful. Her red lips and

sharp eyes, and the way her fiery red hair fluttered in the wind made her look like a goddess. While staring at her, Song Jung-Wook saw her waving, so he showed respect by bowing, but when he raised his head once again, she was no longer there. She was probably headed to the meeting. Song Jung-Wook didn't want to arrive later than the Mercenary Queen, so he sprinted there, and when he arrived, he noticed that everyone was already talking.

'Am I late?'

Song Jung-Wook wasn't *really* nervous, but he knew that he had made a huge mistake today since Castle Rock was under martial law.

"You're late…"

"Yes, I'm sorry," Song Jung-Wook apologized.

"It's fine, since we haven't decided on the unit structure yet. But I'd appreciate it if you could be more careful from now on," Lee Ki-Young said.

'That's it… '

"I'm very sorry," he apologized once again.

Song Jung-Wook was *very* happy when Lee Ki-Young told him it was fine.

'It's nice having a powerful friend.'

"Let's continue our conversation," Lee Ki-Young suggested.

"Okay…"

"Please have a seat, Mr. Song Jung-Wook. We're currently discussing the layout of the units," Lee Ki-Young added.

"All right…"

"We have decided to integrate the small guilds and clans as a whole in the command chain. We tried our best to give you autonomy, and I am sorry for the inconvenience, but please understand that we absolutely need a structure," Lee Ki-Young started the discussion by apologizing.

“You don’t need to care so much, darling. They just need to follow your orders, don’t you agree? You can use military law to deal with those who disobey. You just need to cut their heads off. Am I wrong?” Cha Hee-Ra asked.

“Yes, you’re right, Miss Cha-Hee Ra…”

“Y-Yes, of course. The Mercenary Queen is right.”

“See, everyone agrees. In war, the commander’s orders are law, and this applies to both Lindel and Castle Rock, so there’s no need to question where my darling is from. I’d also like to remind everyone… I’m not soft-hearted like my darling. Disobeying orders means death,” Cha Hee-Ra warned.

“Yes, Ma’am!”

“Understood…”

“Noona,” Lee Ki-Young called out.

“Okay, okay, I’ll quiet down. Don’t look at me like that, darling,” she said.

Song Jung-Wook looked around and the clan and guild masters were trying not to make eye contact with her. He could understand their reaction. After all, Cha Hee-Ra was the strongest in Lindel and one of the top five most powerful people in the Holy Empire. The free city citizens of Castle Rock found it hard to adjust to being with a person of her caliber. However, it seemed like the Mercenary Queen’s lover had put in a good word for Song Jung-Wook because he remembered how she had waved at him earlier.

‘I’m safe. Thanks, Lee Ki-Young. Hehehe.’

Naturally, Song Jung-Wook imagined getting all the benefits while standing in the back line and he may even get sweeter benefits since he had played a key role in placing Lee Ki-Young in *that* position.

“We should announce the formations first. We have decided on the defenders of the first wall,” Lee Ki-Young said.

“Okay.”

“The first wall is very dangerous and since it’s a strategic point, we thought it would be best to leave it to someone we could trust,” Lee Ki-Young added.

‘That’s right… ’

Song Jung-Wook couldn’t help but smile, because it would be very beneficial to him if a rival guild ended up being placed on the first wall.

“The Small Stone Guild will handle the first wall,” Lee Ki-Young announced.

“What?”

‘What?’

Song Jung-Wook turned his head and saw Lee Ki-Young’s bright smile.

‘This… This bastard!’

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1. Chapter is from Song Jung-Wook’s POV, but in 3rd person ☜

CHAPTER 170
BETRAYAL OF TRUST (2)

"The Small Stone Guild will be in charge of the first wall," I announced.

Song Jung-Wook was so flustered that his face started shaking, which made his cheeks jiggle. It was funny for me, but I was sure it wasn't funny for him. He probably wanted to scream and it was obvious why he was holding back his insults.

'Cha Hee-Ra, the anger management therapist.'

The fact that my lovely Cha Hee-Ra was next to me was the biggest reason.

'In war, the commander's orders are law and this applies to both Lindel and Castle Rock, so no need to question where my darling is from. I'd also like to remind everyone… I'm not soft-hearted like my darling. Disobeying orders means death.'

I wasn't sure if Cha Hee-Ra calculated this, but thanks to her warning, I was able to move more freely, and basically, I could control my sunbaes however I wanted. They might think I was a sly fox who was using Cha Hee-Ra's power and authority, but it didn't matter. The most important thing was that they gave me this position and that Cha Hee-Ra was beside me. She was like a panacea that could take care of all sorts of conflict.

Seeing Song Jung-Wook staying quiet made me understand how valuable Cha Hee-Ra's presence was for me.

'He looks as if he's been backstabbed.'

We were eventually going to split up because he wasn't competent enough for me to keep using him and rather than getting closer to him, I would rather use him as an offering to relieve Jo Hye-Jin.

'Sorry, Jung-Wook… '

"The Giant Guild and Peppermint Guild will take care of the second wall… and the

castle will take care of the third wall. The Clan Union in the northern part of Castle Rock will take care of the fourth and fifth wall and as I've mentioned before, Castle Rock's merchant guild will take care of the supplies," I added.

"Okay…"

"All right…"

"Understood…"

"We'll set up a central command center around the Blue Guild and the Red Mercenary Guild and come up with a standardized reporting system," I said.

"*Oh…* okay."

"It seems like the atmosphere got tense because of the Mercenary Queen, so I would like to apologize again for what happened. *Hahaha*. I agree that we need to be on our toes, but I prefer a more relaxed meeting," I added.

"*Hahaha*."

"*Hahahaha*."

I didn't say it as a joke, but I guess they thought it was the time to laugh because they smiled brightly and chuckled.

'Pffft.'

Everyone was walking on eggshells around me because they were afraid of going to the first wall. Some were surprised by the fact that I suddenly abandoned Song Jung-Wook, but that wasn't the important part. The important part was that I had taken away his insignificant power and he had no choice but to accept it. Seeing the other guild masters look at me desperately made me smile. I guess they weren't as close with Song Jung-Wook as I thought.

"If you have any suggestions, feel free to speak up," I told them.

"*Hahaha*. We don't have any."

"If you have any complaints with the formation, please let me know and I'll consider

it," I added.

"*Um…* Mr. Ki-Young."

"Yes?"

"Well… I don't have any complaints about the formation, but don't you think we should focus more on the western wall? Of course, this is my personal suggestion," Song Jung-Wook said.

"Thank you for your suggestion," I said.

'He's sharper than I thought.'

When I was about to speak with the answer I prepared, Cha Hee-Ra spoke up first. It was just like her to talk while twisting her hair with one finger as if she was bored.

"Darling, you thought it was better to focus on the first wall since it's facing the forest, right? And that's also the reason why you gave the Small Stone Guild the important task. If the monsters break through the first wall, then the castle and Red Mercenary Guild will provide support at the western wall, so don't worry."

"I… understand. I'm sorry for bringing it up," Song Jung-Wook replied, apologizing.

"No need to apologize. You asked because you didn't know…" Cha Hee-Ra casually said.

"The Mercenary Queen is right. You can ask all the questions you want and since I'm still lacking, I'm sure your suggestions will be very helpful," I added.

"You're not lacking. You've done this much in such a short period of time and I don't see any flaws… If it wasn't for the Blue Guild, they wouldn't have been able to do this," Cha Hee-Ra complimented me.

"…"

"I guarantee that they wouldn't be able to defend properly. They'll probably prepare after discovering the monsters, but it won't be enough and in the end, they'll either abandon Castle Rock or die," she added.

“Th-That’s…”

I agreed with Cha Hee-Ra, but I couldn’t say that in front of everyone.

“Noona,” I said.

“Yeah, yeah, I know…”

I appreciated her support, but the problem was that she was supporting me too much and since things were getting awkward, I thought it would be best to end the meeting right here.

“Well, we haven’t really done much today, but since the formations have already been distributed, we should probably start setting up. I’ll provide the details to each unit at a later date and it’ll be up to the guild masters on how they want to handle their work. Everyone is required to attend the training in the afternoon,” I announced.

“Okay…”

“I understand…”

“Everyone, thank you for coming here today,” I said.

The way people tried to impress me even while exiting was ridiculous.

‘None of them think we’re in a crisis.’

There were some who understood the seriousness of the situation, but the majority of them seemed too relaxed. It felt like they cared more about the reward they were going to get after rather than stopping the monster wave. It seemed that no matter where you went, everyone was interested in the same thing.

In a war, it was true that the commanders standing in the back were in less danger, so I guess it was natural for them to act that way.

While I was saying goodbye to everyone, I heard Song Jung-Wook’s voice.

“Excuse me, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

“Yes, Mr. Song Jung-Wook.”

"*Um…*"

"Please tell me what's on your mind," I said.

"W-Well…"

"Yes?"

"If I did anything wrong…"

"I don't understand?" I told him.

"What?" he asked.

"*Hahaha*. You've done nothing wrong, master. Actually, I wanted to thank you because you'll be in charge of the first wall, which is a pretty precarious position," I said.

'It's more like I'm making him do it… '

"I'm certain the Small Stone Guild will become a role model for the knights of the castle and the other citizens. We'll provide support as much as we can so don't worry about anything else and just focus on protecting Castle Rock," I explained.

'Although it'll be hard to focus… '

He must've thought this was absurd that he couldn't say anything else.

"Is there a problem?" I asked.

"It's… nothing, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," he replied.

"I'm sure you already know, but your mission and responsibilities are very important. I hope you'll do your best," I added.

"Sure…"

He would do his best because he would die if he wouldn't.

'You're not even worthy of death.'

"*Oh,* if you have any questions or need anything, please let my adjutant know from now on," I told him.

"Your adjutant?" Song Jung-Wook asked.

"Come out here!" I called out.

"Yes, sub guild master."

"It's Miss Jo Hye-Jin," I said.

Song Jung-Wook bit his lips and he had to be thinking that Jo Hye-Jin was the reason why I abandoned him. I wasn't intentionally trying to come between them, but this wasn't bad either. Even when I moved while looking at Cha Hee-Ra, I noticed him tightening his fist.

'It's not totally wrong… '

Jo Hye-Jin was half the reason why he was thrown away, so there was no reason for me to clear up the understanding because it was better for her to take the blame. Even if he tried to pull something, it was too late because had no choice.

"Miss Hye-Jin will be in charge of all the important and trivial matters of the units since I won't have the luxury to take care of trivial matters. Now that I think about it, you two know each other, so why not catch up?" I suggested.

"Sure, sub guild master," Jo Hye-Jin replied with a nod.

"*Hahaha*. I'll leave it to you, Miss Hye-Jin," I said, chuckling.

When I started walking away, I heard the two talking but I didn't really care.

'I'm sure they're fighting and resenting each other.'

The benefits I would receive through this big event and carrying out the plan was more important than their conversation. Carrying out the plan alone was already giving me a headache.

"Are you trying to come between them, darling?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

“It’s nothing like that, Noona. More importantly, thanks for coming,” I told her.

“Actually, I wanted to thank you for calling me here… I was actually waiting for an event like this,” she said.

“It makes me feel better to hear that,” I said.

“It’d be nice if a monster wave really did happen, but it most likely won’t happen. At least I got to see my darling’s face and I can keep my guild on their toes, so it’s not so bad,” she explained.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I’m saying there’s a chance that a monster wave won’t happen, darling,” she answered.

“No way,” I commented.

“The circumstances Kim Hyun-Sung presented shows that it’ll likely happen, but… I feel like the evidence is lacking,” she added.

“What?”

“You probably don’t know since it hasn’t been that long since you came here, but when a forest dies or a dungeon becomes unstable, those are usually the signs of a monster wave. When monsters run out of food or they can’t live in the forest anymore, they’ll come outside, but even after looking through the documents, there aren’t any signs that the forest is dying,” she explained.

“Is that so?”

“I also haven’t found any dungeons nearby that could potentially provoke the monsters… Would it be easier to understand if I said there are signs, but no reason for a monster wave?” she asked.

“I understand what you’re saying,” I replied.

Unlike Cha Hee-Ra who had already experienced a monster wave, I couldn’t really pinpoint anything since I didn’t have any experience, but despite that, I felt like something was missing and I knew I wasn’t the only one who felt this way. As if

thoroughly preparing for the monster wave wasn't enough, Kim Hyun-Sung also looked like he was busy trying to find the reason as well because our lovely regressor wasn't deeply involved with Castle Rock in his past life. As such, he had no idea why the monster wave even happened.

'But it has already been confirmed… '

Whatever the reason, it was *going* to happen and it wasn't going to be an easy fight.

While I was thinking about whether to tell her about the things that were going to happen.

"*Kyaaahhh!*"

'What the?'

I heard the faint cry of a monster; it was inside the city, not outside.

"What was that just now?"

CHAPTER 171
BETRAYAL OF TRUST (3)

I heard the faint cry of a monster. It wasn't outside, but inside the city.

"What was that just now?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

Even as I shook my head at her question, the monster's cries continued. It was a long, thin high-pitched cry that was too alien to be imitated by a human.

"*Kyahhhhh*!"

'Did the monsters from the underground auction house escape?'

It wasn't completely unlikely, but the cry was a bit too sad for that. Whatever the reason, finding out the source of the cry was the right thing to do. However, just as I was about to speak to her…

"Could you be quiet for a moment, darling?" she asked.

"*Huh?*"

"Stay quiet for a moment," she repeated.

Cha Hee-Ra looked as if she was trying to sense something and even though I couldn't understand her actions, I quickly realized why she told me to be quiet. When I looked down, the ground started shaking as if there was an earthquake while the small rocks started to jump about. It wasn't just me who felt it.

'What's… going on?'

"Get ready," Cha Hee-Ra said.

"For what?" I asked.

"I think they're coming…"

“What?” I asked once again.

“I’m not joking. I guess I was wrong. It’s on its way right now, so we need to prepare as soon as possible. They’re still kind of far, but… they’ll reach this place sooner or later,” she explained.

“This is so sudden…”

I couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity of this situation. I thought they wouldn’t come here until much later since Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t seem like he was waiting for an enemy that would arrive soon even though he looked busy.

‘Maybe it’s happening a lot sooner than in his past life. Did Kim Hyun-Sung already know that the monsters were going to arrive today? Right now?’

As if he had read my mind, Kim Hyun-Sung ran toward us while panicking.

‘He had no idea.’

He wasn’t a very good liar, so when I saw his expression of disbelief, I realized that the monster wave was happening a lot sooner than it had in his past life. He probably thought something was wrong.

“Mr. Ki-Young,” he called out.

“Yes, Mr. Hyun-Sung.”

“We need to quickly prepare… I think the monster wave has started,” he said.

“I see. Got it,” I told him.

Kim Hyun and I were questioning what went wrong. I thought maybe we changed the future somehow, but there hadn’t been anything in particular that could’ve caused this because all we did was form the militia units a bit faster. As I kept thinking, I immediately realized how this happened.

‘The cry just now… ’

I didn’t know how its cry reached outside the city, but I was certain that the monster’s cry was the trigger.

“I think it’s… a lot bigger than we imagined,” Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

“I see. We’ll get ready for battle right away. What will you do, Mr. Hyun-Sung?” I asked.

“I’ll go notify the castle. You can continue to monitor the situation from central command and manage the reserve force. The Blue Guild will move together,” he replied.

“Alright. Then I’ll have everyone ready their arrows, channel their spells, and wait…”

“Okay, and the sound you heard just now…”

“We’re looking into that right now. If I find something strange, I’ll report it to you right away,” I replied.

“Okay, and Mr. Ki-Young?”

“Yes?”

“I believe in you,” Kim Hyun-Sung suddenly said.

“Thank you,” I replied, nodding.

I felt better not because the regressor trusted me. It was all because I realized Kim Hyun-Sung hadn’t said it out of courtesy. This was a monumental event for him, and it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that it was a golden opportunity to obtain experience points. I was sure it hadn’t been easy for Kim Hyun-Sung to put me in charge, but I was grateful that he was quietly supporting me.

I spaced out for a bit, but I knew I couldn't just stand here like this. When I started running while alerting people about the situation, the nearby soldiers did the same and started alerting the others. A bell tolled, and my surroundings quickly became chaotic.

“Get ready for battle.”

“Get ready for battle!”

“Get ready for battle! Get ready!!”

I quietly instructed. “All troops hold your positions, and the mage corps, channel your spells, and wait!”

“It’s the monsters. All troops; prepare for battle! Hold your positions and the mage corps, wait after channeling your spells!”

A messenger yelling out orders for me made things easier.

I guess Castle Rock was doing fine because they looked like they immediately assumed battle formation.

Everyone was readying their arrows and channeling their spells without knowing what was going on, while the tolling of the bell made them nervous. The chaos made me unable to think, but even though it was only for a moment, I recalled the monster egg I had seen in the auction house. The cry I heard earlier sounded as if it came from a puppy looking for its mother.

‘It can’t be, right?’

I couldn’t check it for myself, but it was possible that the egg hatched unless the egg was sold or a guild stored it in their warehouse for some reason.

‘I should’ve looked into it more.’

I should have been suspicious the moment the egg was shown at the central auction house. It was unlikely, but for some reason, it would make sense if the cry from earlier was the reason why the monster wave was happening earlier than usual. Regardless of the reason, I had to find out more about *that* egg.

“Noona,” I called out.

“What?” Cha Hee-Ra asked.

“The sound we heard from the city just now…”

“Do you want it checked out?” she asked.

“Yes, but you don’t have to go; no, I want you to protect this place, noona. The Mercenary Queen’s name will help boost the troops’ morale,” I replied, nodding.

“Naturally,” she remarked.

“What about the western area?” I asked her.

“Once the wave starts, they’ll immediately take action, so you don’t have to worry, darling. I don’t have any issues on my side, so you better think about what kind of reward you’re going to give me once this is over. I’m already overflowing with money, so don’t bother thinking that giving me gold coins will make things even between us…”

“*Ugh…*”

“I knew it. More than that, this is your glorious first campaign… How about a short speech?” Cha Hee-Ra suggested.

“…”

I had wanted to announce my intention for going into this war, but doing it right now was too sudden. I knew the commander’s role was important and although it wasn’t a war against humans, it was still considered a large-scale war, so boosting everyone’s morale was important. But doing that right now was inappropriate because it hadn’t even been that long since they got into battle formation, and everyone was busy doing what they had to do. I thought that the Small Stone Gould would run away, but they were on top of the first wall, surveying the area underneath. The merchant guild delivered arrows and potions, while some of the citizens were either praying to God or trembling in fear.

They could…

‘Probably feel it… ’

The earthquake was starting to become even more intense, and I could hear the monsters’ cries now.

‘Oh jeez… ’

The atmosphere here was so unrealistic that if someone asked me if I was scared, I would definitely answer that I was scared. I thought things were going to be okay, but I was starting to feel anxious.

'Shit… I'm scared… '

But I had too many cards to be cowering in fear…

I had our lovely regressor, Kim Hyun-Sung; the meat shield, Park Deok-Gu; my adorable Jung Ha-Yan whose eyes were only on me; and the experienced priest, Sun Hee-Young. Kim Ye-Ri and Sun Hee-Young weren't as experienced as the others, but they could save me from trouble. The most reliable of them all was standing next to me; it was none other than Cha Hee-Ra. Moreover, since I was observing the situation from the back and had thousands of troops willing to risk their lives for me, my safety was secured.

"I don't need to worry."

"*Huh?*"

"Please activate the voice spell," I ordered.

"You're going to say something?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

"Of course, Hee-Ra noona."

I spoke quietly as the sound of the monsters rushing toward us was getting louder and louder. However, the voice spell reached the walls and the castle, drowning out the monsters' cries for a moment.

"This place isn't our hometown…" I started.

"…"

"To be frank, we have nothing to do with Castle Rock. Some were dragged here, some came here for survival, while others came here to find work…"

"…"

"The environment here isn't the best, so I'm sure that many of us here have had bad memories of this place. Some lost their friends, while others lost their significant others. There are some who drink the night away because of how exhausted their survival is each day, while others often think about whether they should commit suicide or not…"

“Darling?” Cha Hee-Ra blankly questioned.

“Just for a moment. I want all of you to look at what you have created behind you. You people are the ones who made Castle Rock into what it is today. In the past, Castle Rock didn’t have a military facility, but it all changed thanks to you, the free city denizens. Castle Rock had been a dangerous city that people often avoided, but now, there are many tourists visiting the place, and free city denizens from other free cities even often come here to hunt. This was all created by the friends, lovers, and the family members you have lost…”

“…”

“This is what you all achieved and built. The high castle walls that we’re stepping on, the arrows we’re holding, and the place we’re standing in. This was all possible because of you people. It’s a precious place created from your blood and sweat. This place is our shelter, and our home filled with friends and family that we love…”

“That was a nice speech, darling,” Cha Hee-Ra complimented.

I didn’t respond to her compliment, as I continued. “I would like to ask all of you this. Is Castle Rock really not *our* hometown? Do you really believe that this place doesn’t have anything to do with you?”

“…”

“Castle Rock is safe. If you raise your weapon with the intention of protecting this place, our hometown will be safe! Everyone, we’re not raising our swords because of the contract we have with the Holy Empire. We’re raising our weapons to protect our hometown. Let’s protect our home together!” I yelled.

My speech had been so sudden, but the effect wasn’t too bad. Humans had always been easily moved by trivial speeches like this during dangerous situations.

‘Even though I’m not from Castle Rock… ’

I knew that no one would think of that. Some might curse me for the speech I had made, but the others would scream to get rid of their fear.

“L-Let’s protect… our hometown!”

Just like that…

“Protect our hometown! Let’s protect our home!”

Very nice…

“Protect our hometown!!!”

The small scream started to spread to the different areas of the wall like a disease. I found it quite amusing to see the Small Stone Guild screaming about protecting their hometown.

‘You guys can do that then, you bastards.’

“*Roooooooooar!*”

We saw the monsters charging out of the forest and even though some of the troops flinched, they unknowingly started chanting about protecting their hometown.

“Castle Rock will be safe today, everyone!” I yelled once more.

“Protect Castle Rock!”

“Ready!”

“*Roooooooooar!*”

“Fire!”

Magic and arrows immediately covered the sky.

CHAPTER 172
BETRAYAL OF TRUST (4)

I never imagined I would see fireballs and arrows covering the sky because they only appeared in movies, but the monsters charging toward the castle walls was an even more unrealistic sight.

"*Roooooooar!*"

'Why are there so many of them?'

It was true that I hadn't gone hunting a lot, but there were still many types of monsters I was seeing for the first time. Small monsters were being crushed by mid-sized monsters about five times bigger than humans. Even though they were all different, they all had the same goal—climbing over the walls. It was a frightening sight. As the troops continued firing arrows and spells, we heard a brief, but loud roar.

Roooooar!

Craaaack!

Cruuuuuumble!

An explosion ensued, and as debris started falling, the smaller monsters were caught in the net of fire. Not only did the mid-sized monsters die from the arrows, but the arrows filled with magic landed on the smaller monsters' heads and made their heads explode. However, there were too many of them, and it was ridiculous how they kept coming out from the forest.

'Where have they been all this time?'

I was sure monsters living deep in the forest had also come out, and since the forest was big, there would naturally be a lot of monsters.

"Fire!" I shouted.

The second volley of arrows flew over the walls and into the ground and the same thing happened as before. When the monsters fell and the monsters behind them tripped, I raised my hand slightly, and the mages specializing in the earth element activated a spell that created a spear out of dirt and rocks. The stupid, charging monsters cried out when the spear pierced through them.

'Nice… '

The situation was great and even though it wasn't noticeable, the current attacks were getting rid of the weak monsters.

'It's not very noticeable… '

The only thing I could do was efficiently use the arrows and the spells. I thought about casting a spell for experience points purposes, but I decided not to. For the efficiency of the regressor's plan, I had to let the troops take care of the average and rare-ranked monsters.

'I need to save my mana.'

It was all for the enormous experience points I would get later.

"This is easy…" Cha Hee-Ra commented.

"Oh, yeah?" I asked.

"Yes, darling. This is a pretty smooth start. It's impressive how they used earth magic to put a brake on the monsters. Since there aren't a lot of monsters here that can fly, if we continue blocking the entrance, they'll eventually retreat," she explained.

"That's good news," I said.

"I suggest you save your mana, darling. Situations like this don't come often." Cha Hee-Ra suggested.

"I know…"

It seemed that even in this world, the powerful cared more about their own benefits than those without power. Unlike those who followed orders and fired at the average and rare-ranked monsters for survival, the commanders saved their mana and

stamina.

“They’ve reached the first wall,” she remarked.

“Yeah, it seems…” I nodded.

During the castle defense, the monsters during the first wave started crashing into the castle walls. They seemed strong, but the walls that protected Castle Rock for over 100 years wouldn’t break down so easily. The monsters in position started climbing the walls by stepping on each other.

“Stop them!”

“*Roooooooar!*”

“Fire the arrows! Shit! The arrows!”

“Stop them with magic!”

It was *very* impressive how the Small Stone Guild was defending the first wall.

‘Wow… they’re desperate.’

They knew they would die if they didn’t act desperately, and I honestly wanted to leave them to die, but I couldn’t do that. The monster wave had just started, and they were necessary for us to endure the wave. I teared up a little when I saw Song Jung-Wook doing his best to protect his guild members.

‘What noble bastards… ’

They were protecting their hometown, but they couldn’t protect themselves. Now that was what I call *sacrifice.* The archers kept shooting arrows while the mages were already exhausted. The priests were on high alert while the soldiers were toppling over the monsters climbing the walls. Song Jung-Wook was among those soldiers.

“No matter what, don’t let them climb up!”

I knew for sure he wanted to run away, but he simply couldn’t do so because Red Mercenary Guild members were stationed all over the place. Even I would find it

difficult to run away, so of course, he wouldn't be able to make that decision after considering the guild he had built and his influence over Castle Rock. Sure, I talked about this place being our *hometown* earlier, but he definitely considered this place more valuable than his actual hometown.

'Wow… '

They were standing their ground unlike what I expected, and as their commander, I felt proud of them.

"Support at the first wall!" Song Jung-Wook requested.

"Understood, We'll support the first wall. The reserve squad will immediately head to the first wall!" I ordered.

This war could last a long time, so it was important to properly manage the troops' stamina and the reserve forces. It was a bit burdensome to think that hundreds and thousands of lives rested in my hands, but thinking of them as numbers rather than lives made things more efficient. Loving mankind here would only put me in a bad situation.

I was sure the other walls would experience some damage, but giving the first wall some room to breathe would make the situation more manageable.

"*Hm…"*

"What's wrong, Hee-Ra noona?" I asked.

"It's just… I think you'll become a competent commander, darling," she replied.

"…"

I didn't bother to answer since it seemed like she knew what I was thinking.

"You seem to like giving hope," she added.

I continued looking at Song Jung-Wook, and as the reserve forces arrived, his exhausted face turned into a hopeful one. This would make it seem like I hadn't given up on the first wall.

“Support is here! Hang on just a little longer, guys!” Song Jung-Wook yelled.

“Yes, Guildmaster!”

I wasn’t sure what Song Jung-Wook was thinking, but it was impressive how he was giving it his all. When the reserve force started supporting the first wall, the monsters’ ascent slowed down.

“It’s not because I like giving hope, Hee-Ra noona. I just think that using them as much as I can is the best thing to do,” I explained.

“Alright…”

“The first wall will eventually fall. When I looked at Castle Rock’s defense war records, there hasn’t been a time when the first wall didn’t break during the wars they had in the last century. Of course, there had been times when the walls were never fully demolished, but the first wall *always* broke down during the many wars this place had experienced,” I told her.

“You studied hard,” she complimented me.

“You can easily find this information if you just read the records. I don’t know what Castle Rock’s wall architect had in mind when they built this, but I’m sure they were kind of crazy,” I added.

“Why do you say that?” she asked.

“They built it so that sacrifices are necessary during a defense war. The guy who built this wall designed it so that the people on the first wall wouldn’t be able to survive, and… *hm…* that’s the reason why the remaining bases are surrounding the first wall. Basically, Castle Rock never fell because so many people had sacrificed themselves for this city,” I explained.

“And you’re saying that the Small Stone Guild is the sacrifice?” she asked.

“Of course, and I’m sure they can endure a bit longer. I’ll use them until they’re no longer needed and after they run out of mana, I can just dispose of them. After all, I’m sure they’ll feel wronged if they die while still having mana, and it’ll be a loss for us as well,” I replied.

“That sounds like a *really* shitty move…” Cha Hee-Ra couldn’t help but say.

“I thought this was the reason why you called me a competent commander?” I riposted.

“That’s true, but… you’re still a piece of crap.”

“They’re criminals who had to die anyway. They should be thankful since I gave them the chance to die in a war. It’ll basically be an honorable death.”

Even though there wasn’t proof that Song Jung-Wook had committed a crime, finding evidence wasn’t difficult to do and if he became lucky and survived this place, he would still eventually die. Dying in the monsters’ hands was a lot better than being tortured by us, and he would also be a temporary role model to everyone. As such, I was sure he would still be useful to me even after he died.

“Fight back!” Song Jung-Wook yelled.

“Don’t let them climb up! Never! Soldiers, what are you doing?!” he yelled once again.

‘They’re holding out better than I thought… ’

The fact that the first wall’s defense was still being maintained was a miracle, and even though there were only rare-ranked monsters for now, it wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the first wall defense group was doing their part. If they managed to stop a higher-ranked monster, it wouldn’t be bad to send them more support since the Small Stone Guild were doing more than what they were worth.

When the arrows landed on the monsters below the first wall, they screamed and the situation started to slow down a bit. Song Jung-Wook looked hopeful, and he looked at me as if he completely trusted me.

‘Idiot… ’

He probably thought that I had placed his guild there to give them an active role.

All of a sudden, monsters above the rare-rank started to appear from behind the wave. Epic-ranked monsters that could only be killed with a party were starting to climb the walls as well.

'This is only the beginning… '

A four-legged monster jumped a long distance at once and started climbing the wall. Based on the manual, we had to focus our spells on that monster, and our first goal was to send the reserve forces and tire it out. When I saw how Jung Ha-Yan and Hwang Jung-Yeon's spells were falling on the monster, I thought we had to use some of our powers as well. However, I noticed the Small Stone Guild fighting the monsters with their swords when support no longer arrived.

'Sending support is meaningless… '

I thought it was time to abandon the Small Stone Guild, so I made the remaining soldiers slowly retreat, and I had them support the first wall from afar. I could already hear screaming in some areas on the first wall.

"*Ahhhhhhhh!*"

"Save me! Save…!"

Song Jung-Wook was probably anxious, as I saw him looking at me with a desperate look. When he turned his head, however, he must have noticed the retreat of the reserve forces as he started yelling.

"Lee Ki-Young, you bastard! R-Retreat! Move back…!"

Of course, they couldn't retreat because turning their backs toward the monsters was impossible. I could barely hear his scream because of the monsters' cries.

"Lee Ki-Young! You bastard! Lee Ki-Young!! Lee Ki-Youuuuung!!!"

'Goodbye… '

"Lee Ki-Youuuuung!"

When I could no longer hear Song Jung-Wook's voice, as too many monsters had invaded the first wall, I spoke with tears in my eyes.

"We can't let the Small Stone Guild's sacrifice be in vain!"

CHAPTER 173
BETRAYAL OF TRUST (5)

I had tears in my eyes.

“We can’t let the Small Stone Guild’s sacrifice be in vain!”

When my voice spread because of the voice amplification magic, I thought the soldiers would pull themselves together rather than be shaken by it. A few thought about the possibility of them dying like the Small Stone Guild, but they didn’t seem like they would run away. I was sure they hadn’t heard the screams of the Small Stone Guild since they were busy fighting monsters in contrast to me observing the situation with the help of magic.

The way Song Jung-Wook cursed at me and struggled while fighting a monster was a beautiful ending you would see only in movies. The Small Stone Guild and Song Jung-Wook fought for Castle Rock until they breathed their last. They were the best heroes this defense war created.

‘You can play the hero all you want, Jung-Wook.’

It should be fine to talk about their performance on the first wall, as I had no intention of becoming a hero.

‘It’s better to just survive.’

As one of the guilds representing Castle Rock, the troops would naturally be moved by the Small Stone Guild’s sacrifice, and I noticed more and more people agreeing with me.

“Don’t let the Small Stone Guild’s sacrifice be in vain!”

“You dirty monsters! Bastards!”

“Let’s protect our hometown!”

The troops became energetic as if they had received a buff, as the archers continued to fire their arrows, the warriors fought with their swords, and the priests continued to use their holy powers. It was time for me to set an example, so I started casting a spell.

It was time to show the dirty monsters how powerful Castle Rock was when everyone was united.

"Let's protect Castle Rock!"

'Hahahaha… '

Jung Ha-Yan must've felt my mana because she started casting as well, and if we combined our mana, we should be able to inflict great damage on those monsters.

'I should be able to get lots of experience points.'

The catalyst that had reformed into a hand appeared in the sky, and in addition to its growth, it was also becoming more powerful thanks to Jung Ha-Yan's magic infusion.

Boom!

The monsters on the first wall were killed, and there had to be a few Small Stone Guild members there. However, a small sacrifice had to be done for the greater good. The hand continued to grow, and the person behind its growth was obvious.

'Ha-Yan!'

Booooooom!

Craaaaaaaack!

"*Roooooooooar!*"

'Nice!'

Even though I couldn't hear my experience points rising, I knew that hundreds of monsters must have died after being buried beneath the rubble of the wall that had been destroyed.

[A few jobs have opened. Please select the job you think you need.]

'Already?'

Growth was more difficult the higher your rank, so this was a huge achievement. I couldn't help but smile because even though I knew I killed a lot of monsters, I didn't expect that new jobs would open up. Cha Hee-Ra must've seen my expression because she started talking.

"Got a new job?"

"Yeah. I didn't think I'd get it so quickly," I replied.

"How many jobs have you changed into, darling?" she asked.

"This will be the fourth," I replied.

"I think you got a good amount of experience just now, but that was fast… The experience points you earned during the Ito Sota incident must have contributed as well. Combat usually gives the most experience points, but you do get experience points in all of your actions. You can think more about your job after the wave is cleared because you'll still accumulate experience points," she explained.

"Thanks for the tip," I responded with a smile.

"It's a known fact, and you have to calm down," Cha Hee-Ra advised.

"I know. Let's focus our firepower on the first wall! It's Song Jung-Wook's final message—the final message of the Small Stone Guild's Guildmaster!"

Of course, he never said anything like that.

"We mustn't let Mr. Song Jung-Wook's wish to protect Castle Rock disappear in vain! Everyone! Hang on just a little longer. We can't protect anything without sacrifice. That's why Mr. Song Jung-Wook fought until the end on the first wall and sacrificed himself! Let's all fight together for the hero that died while protecting Castle Rock! Everyone, fire!" I yelled.

There could be survivors on the first wall…

The Small Stone Guild lasted longer than my expectations, but they had also aggroed the monsters. So many arrows and spells landed on those monsters that I couldn't count them anymore.

Booooooooooooom!

Craaaaaaaack!

Using fire magic was worth it, as some monsters turned to ashes while the small monsters directly exploded after being unable to endure the explosions around them.

'Nice… '

"*Kyaaaaaaaaaaah!*"

"*Roooooooooar!*"

The monsters landed on the other monsters as they struggled and fell from the wall, and even though it only lasted for a moment, a large hole had formed on the ground where the monsters had gathered. There were monsters filling that hole, but they obviously had to endure a lot of damage.

'It's all thanks to Song Jung-Wook… '

I couldn't help but thank the dead bastard while smiling.

"This could be easier than I thought…"

What Cha Hee-Ra said was an undeniable fact, as our allies were driving out the monsters even though there were epic-ranked monsters in the wave. When the monsters climbed the walls, a guild's executive member or a clan master would mark them, and our Blue Guild was one of the guilds doing that. The way Kim Hyun-Sung was jumping from wall to wall, and killing the monsters made him look like a god. I wasn't sure how he had managed to cut off a large monster's head with one stroke of his sword, but our regressor was doing a lot on his own.

'Even Kim Ye-Ri… '

The same could be said about Jung Ha-Yan, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Sun Hee-Young. Hwang Jung-Yeon was working hard to support Jung Ha-Yan's magic while Sun Hee-Young was spreading holy magic all over the place. Park Deok-Gu was the only normal member of our party, but he was still doing his part. I finally realized how much influence a well-trained, and competent party could have on a battlefield.

'We've grown a lot.'

A person wearing the Red Mercenary Guild's badge quickly came toward us.

"Miss Cha Hee-Ra…"

"Has it been taken care of?" she asked.

"Yes. We've acquired all the items from the underground auction house as per your orders, and we also discovered the source of the monster's cry earlier," they replied.

"Report," she ordered.

"It came from an egg in the Small Stone Guild's warehouse, but it's nothing like we've seen before…" they answered.

"What?"

"It's a monster we've never seen before. After occupying the Small Stone Guild house, we've been acquiring new recruits, but… I think you should come and see for yourself. It could be—"

'Huh?'

"It could be the reason why this monster wave happened…" I said, finishing their sentence.

I saw them nodding.

'I knew it… '

I couldn't help but get a headache when my casual assumption turned out to be right. If the monster wave did start all because of a monster egg, then we may have to fight against its parents, and Cha Hee-Ra must've thought the same since she quietly

looked toward the walls.

“Did you find out where they got the egg from?” she asked.

“We questioned the person in charge of the guild’s warehouse, but they only said that they found it deep in the forest,” they answered.

“*Huh…* crazy bastards. Taking a monster’s egg is not only illegal, but it’s also a taboo. I knew they’ve been doing illegal work, but I had never imagined they were this dumb… At this point, I’m starting to think that they died *very* comfortably…”

“Then the monster wave…”

“It probably happened because of the baby. It makes sense now. Now, I understand what their guild master found, and that cry is what started the wave…” she explained.

“Are we in a dangerous situation?” I asked.

Of course, this was dangerous.

“No, it won’t be a big problem. For now… I think it’ll be best if you go and check it out, darling. I should get rid of the small fries before the main monster appears. Don’t worry too much. It’s just one more thing we need to take care of…”

I was a bit flustered when Cha Hee-Ra said that she was going to fight, as it meant the situation was becoming tense.

“I’ll be back,” she added.

“Okay,” I could only reply.

She jumped down the wall after casually waving to me, and when I glanced at the Red Mercenary Guild member, they immediately spoke. “She’ll feel more comfortable fighting alone.”

“I see…”

“The master becomes excited pretty often when she’s focused… I guess you could say she goes berserk,” they added.

I knew that much thanks to her attribute.

[Attribute - Madwoman Crazy About Blood - Epic Rank]

[Lowers her intelligence temporarily to increase her attack power.]

I wasn't sure whether the decrease affected her intelligence *stat*, or if it was her *intelligence*. Her attribute probably made Cha Hee-Ra the person she was today, as her strength stat was 97, and if her attack increased, she would basically be a god.

Riiiiip!

Booooooooom!

When I looked down, the monsters were being torn apart, and although she currently looked calm while killing the monsters, I could see her slow transformation into a beast. The way she jumped on top of an epic-ranked monster, and ripped off its jaw with her hand before ripping its head off made her look like an actual monster.

'She's strong… '

I knew that people similar to Ito Sota were strong, but Cha Hee-Ra was a lot stronger than I had expected.

To be honest… I was kind of scared. She definitely didn't seem like she was in her right mind when she smiled while covered in monster entrails.

'Scary… '

Cha Hee-Ra's bloodthirsty eyes landed on top of the wall.

"Huh?"

I wasn't imagining it. I didn't know why she was staring at me, but she was smiling while holding a monster's head. Cha Hee-Ra was mad.

‘No way… ’

[Checking Player Cha Hee-Ra’s Unique Habit.]

[Instinctive Lioness]

‘No way… ’

When Cha Hee-Ra suddenly charged toward me, I knew that something was definitely wrong.

“Shit! Run!” I cried out.

I didn’t know why, but Cha Hee-Ra was *definitely* chasing me.

CHAPTER 174
INSTINCTIVE LIONESS (1)

"Shit! Run!" I cried out.

I didn't know why, but Cha Hee-Ra was chasing me. The way she glared at me with those bloody eyes, and the way she smiled while making sounds only a beast would make gave me goosebumps.

'Shit… '

The strong and independent Cha Hee-Ra had become a bomb. I was able to stop Jung Ha-Yan before she blew up, but Cha Hee-Ra's explosion was totally unexpected. The majority of the situations were predictable, and this expedition was no different. Even though I realized it later, I still discovered the reason behind the monster wave, and the fact that the first wall would collapse. For this defense war, I had prepared a lot for the variables, and I even made a manual in case a named monster appeared. I simulated the situation with all sorts of variables, but I had never imagined I would get chased by my own ally.

'I didn't include this kind of situation in my simulations.'

It was ridiculous how Cha Hee-Ra started running up the wall after throwing the monster's head. Based on her unique habit, I had a feeling why she was looking at me instead of the enemy. Right now, Cha Hee-Ra's intelligence was lowered, and I was sure that she also didn't expect this to happen. She would usually focus on unleashing the violence within her whenever she activated her attribute and transformed into a madwoman crazy about blood. But this time, it seemed as if she had unleashed something else. Moreover, she would have warned me if this had happened before.

'This must be the first time… '

[Checking Player Cha Hee-Ra's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Cha Hee-Ra]

[Title - Madwoman Crazy About Blood, Red Mercenary, Holy Empire's Red Madwoman]

[Age - 28]

[Nature - Unpredictable Innovator]

[Job - Mercenary Queen - Legendary Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic swordsmanship knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate weapon knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced weapon knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced dual weapon knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced magic operation knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 117/Above legendary growth limit]

[Agility - 90/Below epic growth limit]

[Stamina - 90/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 00/Above rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 90/Above epic growth limit]

[Luck - 56/Above rare growth limit]

[Magic - 82/Below epic growth limit]

[Gear - None]

[Attribute - Madwoman Crazy About Blood - Epic Rank]

[Lowers her intelligence temporarily to increase her attack power.]

[Overall Review - Cha Hee-Ra's intelligence stat has temporarily decreased. Even though her strength stat has temporarily increased to 117, she's going beyond her legendary stats. She has lost her mind, so it would be best if you didn't go near her. You must be careful because Player Cha Hee-Ra will rip your paper-like endurance to pieces. I pray this will not be our last meeting. I hope you survive…]

'System, you're not being helpful at all! I'll really kill you no matter what it'll take!'

As expected, Cha Hee-Ra had lost her mind, but what caught my attention the most was that her strength stat and growth limit had exceeded legendary rank.

'Is that even possible?'

I felt like her sneeze was enough to blow me away.

The Red Mercenary Guild member looked confused when they saw her charging toward us.

"H-How?!"

"Just run!" I cried out once more.

I needed a shield to protect me, so I immediately checked their stats.

'Not bad.'

They seemed capable of blocking one or two of her attacks, so it wouldn't be bad to keep them around.

"Has this happened before?" I asked.

"N-No. I've never…"

Cha Hee-Ra continued to climb the wall as we were talking, and even though we tried to run as far away as possible, my agility and stamina stats were lacking.

“Block her!” I yelled.

“O-Okay!”

They held up their shield and tried to block Cha Hee-Ra, but since they weren’t able to block her kick, they fell behind the wall.

Crack!

“*Ahhhhh!*”

She had to be somewhat conscious, as she didn’t kill her subordinate, but an ordinary person would have exploded into pieces before they could even land on the ground.

“Juliena! No! Whitefall! Whitefall!” I yelled desperately.

I remembered the griffon I rode on the way here. I wasn’t sure if it heard me, but all I could do was desperately call out its name. However, the griffon that I thought was brave didn’t answer my call. I wasn’t sure whether it didn’t hear me, or if it was intentionally ignoring me to save itself, but if it was the latter, then I could agree that the griffon was truly like me.

Maybe nothing untoward would happen even if Cha Hee-Ra caught up to me, but the worst-case scenario meant being ripped into pieces. Just in case, running was the right thing to do. I wasn’t sure if I was lucky, but Juliene quickly flew toward me.

‘She’ll buy me some time.’

This was a ridiculous situation during a defense war. The people on one of the walls couldn’t defend properly because of Cha Hee-Ra, so to win this war, I had to lead her into the city.

‘I need to head down the wall first.’

Even without Cha Hee-Ra or me, the defense war should continue smoothly. It would be a different story if the baby’s mother appeared, but the troops fighting hard to protect Castle Rock knew we were winning this war. Unless the other commanders were idiots, there shouldn’t be any issues.

Even as I was desperately running, I heard screams from behind me. Cha Hee-Ra was probably pushing away everything in her way, and her push might be light, but it would still cause a lot of damage. Still, this wasn't the time to worry about the others.

"*Grrrrr*…"

'Is she a monster or something?'

I felt like she was getting closer, and thousands of scenarios ran through my head. Most importantly, I thought about what to do if I got caught since no one could guarantee my safety. All of a sudden, someone lifted me, and when I was about to scream, I found myself soaring into the sky. I realized that my situation had changed. When I opened my eyes, I found myself in Jo Hye-Jin's arms.

"*Hoo!*"

"What's… going on?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"It's a long story. I think it'll be better if we head inside the city first," I suggested.

"*Oh…* okay," she replied.

"Be careful, Miss Hye-Jin," I warned.

"Sure…"

"How's the defense war looking?" I asked her.

"It's going as planned. It just seemed like you were being chased by Miss Cha Hee-Ra…"

"Alright. Does the commanding unit know about this situation?" I asked.

"I was told that to stop the monsters invading from the underground waterway, you and Miss Cha Hee-Ra should head there with some of the troops."

"Who told you that?" I asked.

"Th-That's just what I… *Oh!* We let the master of the Giant Guild command the defense war," she explained.

Jo Hye-Jin had become a bit more flexible. I was sure it was to prevent confusion among the troops, but I wanted to applaud her for being able to lie. The guild master in charge of command was competent enough to question the troop formation at the west wall, so I was certain he would lead the defense war based on the manual.

"But… why is Miss Cha Hee-Ra suddenly…"

I was *really* embarrassed to explain it to her, as I couldn't even understand it myself. When I remained silent, she realized that she shouldn't ask any more questions, and she simply nodded in response to my silence. We seemed busy because Cha Hee-Ra was chasing us. While checking the alleys, I guess she was angry about losing me because she started charging toward us while destroying the buildings in the city. Jo Hye-Jin managed to dodge the debris flying our way as she continued to hold me with one hand. Eventually, we ended up further into the city. We must have been moving rather fast because the scenery suddenly changed.

"*Grrrr*…"

The situation was so ridiculous that I couldn't help but laugh. Using the word *unexpected* to describe this situation would be too shallow—it was so ridiculous to the point that Song Jung-Wook might have cursed me in the afterlife. That was how unrealistic this situation was, but I was sure it wouldn't last a long time. Since it was an attribute, there had to be a time limit and a penalty. When I used Mind's Eye and looked at Cha Hee-Ra, I saw her attribute. From what I could recall, this function never existed, so I guess it appeared when Mind Eye's evolved.

[Checking Player Cha Hee-Ra's Attribute, Madwoman Crazy About Blood.]

[Lowers her intelligence temporarily to increase her attack power. Duration: 1 Hour - Time Remaining: 49 Minutes]

'1 hour... '

It felt like it had been thirty minutes, but only eleven minutes had passed. Still, I was relieved that there was a time limit. If her attribute lasted until she was exhausted, I might've chosen to do something drastic.

“I can hold out for an hour,” I said.

“*Huh?*”

As Jo Hye-Jin questioned me, I saw Cha Hee-Ra jumping from afar.

“Careful!” I cried out.

Jo Hye-Jin turned around, but it was too late. She bit her lips and threw me away before taking out her spear. Unfortunately, the difference between her stats and Cha Hee-Ra’s stats was so massive that she wouldn’t be able to block the latter. But I was wrong; I heard an explosion, but I didn’t see Jo Hye-Jin being blown away. When the sound disappeared, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung blocking Cha Hee-Ra.

‘Hyun-Sung!’

Our Hyun-Sung came to save us, but the sight of him trembling against Cha Hee-Ra was a sight I wasn’t used to seeing. When I saw holy magic being used on him, I discovered that he wasn’t alone.

When I looked back, I saw Sun Hee-Young extending her hand toward Kim Hyun-Sung while Jung Ha-Yan was quietly glaring at Cha Hee-Ra. Even Kim Ye-Ri and Hwang Jung-Yeon came to help us.

“What’s going on, hyung-nim?”

Park Deok-Gu asked while holding his shield in front of me.

“I’m not sure, but I think she went berserk…” I replied.

“You’re probably right. I’ve heard of the Mercenary Queen’s attribute before.”

“I see…”

“She decreases her intelligence to increase her attack, but the attribute’s effect only lasts an hour… since some time has passed already, we just need to hold out. I’m not sure what happened, but we should stop Miss Cha Hee-Ra first.”

“What about the walls?”

“The defense war is going fine, so it should be okay even if we leave for a while.”

Our lovely regressor was the one who answered my question.

“*Oh…* I see.”

“We’ll subdue her without killing her,” Kim Hyun-Sung ordered.

“Is that possible?”

Jung Ha-Yan shook her head when Park Deok-Gu asked. I wasn’t sure if Jung Ha-Yan would use this chance to kill her, but the fire in her eyes gave me goosebumps. The situation would become more complicated if Cha Hee-Ra died here. Actually, based on our powers, our party was at a disadvantage, so we were the ones who should be afraid of losing our heads. The only reason why this balance of power was being maintained was that we had a high-ranked mage, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and our regressor, who always went above and beyond. Jo Hye-Jin was also a contributing member to the balance. If those three weren’t here, Park Deok-Gu would die in three seconds, Kim Ye-Ri in fifteen seconds, and she would end up wiping out everyone else in an instant.

“I don’t know what’s going on…” Park Deok-Gu commented.

We came here to stop the monster wave, so I was certain no one here imagined that we would end up stopping Cha Hee-Ra instead.

‘This was such an important event… ’

CHAPTER 175
INSTINCTIVE LIONESS (2)

"We'll fight her like we're fighting a legendary-ranked named monster. Miss Hee-Young, buff the melee members. Mr. Deok-Gu and Miss Hye-Jin will be the main force to prevent the rearguard from falling apart. Ye-Ri and I will block from the front as much as possible, so Miss Ha-Yan, Mr. Ki-Young, and Miss Jung-Yeon can cast spells that'll stop her," Kim Hyun-Sung ordered.

"Understood…" Sun Hee-Young responded.

"Got it," Park Deok-Gu replied.

Usually, the buff would be applied to the rearguard as well, but to prevent the vanguards' defeat, he wanted the buff to be focused on them, and I agreed with his decision. What was more interesting was that Kim Hyun-Sung looked used to all this, so I assumed Cha Hee-Ra would go berserk a few times in the future, too.

'I'm sure it won't be in a situation like this, though… '

"*Grrrrr*…"

Her messy hair was crimson, and her body was covered in blood. When she quietly glared at us from afar, my body trembled in response.

'Whoo… '

Fortunately, she was able to distinguish her allies and enemies. Seeing how she didn't kill her subordinate earlier made me think she wouldn't perform any dangerous attacks. Of course, we could lose our heads even if she simply threw a rock at us.

"It's coming!"

"*Grr!!*"

A large piece of debris started flying toward us.

'You're not going to kill us, right?'

The large piece of debris hovered over us, but when Hwang Jung-Yeon activated a spell, it remained in the air. It seemed like she was using psychokinesis, but no one exclaimed. We lost Cha Hee-Ra because the building blocked our line of sight, but when she appeared next to us and extended her hand out, Park Deok-Gu surprisingly managed to block her.

"Don't you dare lay a hand on… *kgh!*"

As soon as Park Deok-Gu blocked her attack, he was thrown to the other side and slammed into a building. I didn't think he would die from that, but Cha Hee-Ra must have destroyed his arm, at the very least.

'It only took one second… '

Park Deok-Gu proudly used his shield, but blocking one attack from her was his limit. During all of this, I saw Jo Hye-Jin, Kim Hyun-Sung, and Kim Ye-Ri charging toward her. Cha Hee-Ra tried to hit Kim Hyun-Sung with her arm like she was annoyed with him, but our lovely regressor dodged her attack. Then, I heard Jo Hye-Jin's spear cutting through the air as it flew toward Cha Hee-Ra.

'I can see it.'

The interesting part was that I couldn't see their attacks before, but now I could see them. This was probably the influence of Mind's Eye after evolving into legendary-rank.

When Cha Hee-Ra blocked the spear flying toward her with her hand, Jo Hye-Jin lost her balance, and when Cha Hee-Ra was getting ready to punch her, Kim Ye-Ri appeared behind her with her daggers. My mouth dropped at their coordination. Assuming that they fought together in his past life, it wouldn't be difficult for Kim Hyun-Sung to work with them.

"*Ha!*"

Kim Hyun-Sung attacked Cha Hee-Ra with his sword, but when she jumped, the magic of the three members nearby collided, causing them to be blown away. When

that happened, Jung Ha-Yan's magic immediately filled their spots.

"*Eek!* Disappear!"

'You're not supposed to kill her.'

It seemed like she had unknowingly said her thoughts out loud, but it was hard to imagine Cha Hee-Ra getting hit by Jung Ha-Yan's magic. The Elemental Bomb Jung Ha-Yan showed during the social gathering was the only time she attacked Cha Hee-Ra. Various magic mixed in together, and as it turned the ground into dust, it tried to swallow Cha Hee-Ra.

"*Grr!*"

But Cha Hee-Ra simply pushed away the spell Jung Ha-Yan had poured her mana into, causing a loud explosion, as the spell landed on a building on the other side.

Booooooooom!

Craaaaaack!

'Shit… '

I recalled telling everyone that Castle Rock would be safe as I watched the buildings fall like dominos, but this wasn't the time to worry about that. Taking care of this situation was the priority, and Kim Hyun-Sung must've thought the same thing, as he immediately charged toward Cha Hee-Ra with his sword. Jo Hye-Jin and Kim Ye-Ri quickly followed to support him. A sword, spear, and daggers flew toward her at once, but they were useless. To make things worse, she was trying to kick Kim Ye-Ri away as the latter extended her dagger out.

'Isn't that dangerous?'

Kim Ye-Ri's endurance wasn't that high, and as I quickly tried to cast a spell, Park Deok-Gu jumped out from nowhere and blocked Cha Hee-Ra's attack once again.

"Nice one, Park Deok-Gu!" I yelled.

"*Aaaahhhhhh!*"

Naturally, I saw her flying to the building on the other side again. Even though he quickly left as soon as he came back, he prevented Kim Ye-Ri from retiring thanks to his tenacity and endurance. It seemed like this battle would never end, but no, we have the advantage since all we had to do was endure.

'The problem is… '

I didn't know how much longer Cha Hee-Ra was going to go easy on us, as she was starting to look *really* frustrated. The vestiges of her consciousness were probably telling her not to kill us, but if this continued for an hour, she may not be able to control her strength. If we received a direct hit from her with her legendary-ranked stats, we wouldn't just end up crashing into a building—our bodies would explode on the spot.

'This isn't good… '

Hwang Jung-Yeon, Jung Ha-Yan, and I were still using our magic, but it wasn't that effective. Seeing the frown on Kim Hyun-Sung's face made me think that he was feeling kind of anxious. Both sides weren't exhausted yet, but it annoyed me that I had to use my precious stamina and magic on her instead of using them on the monsters to farm experience points. However…

'We can't keep going like this.'

The experience points weren't the problem. If the baby's mother appeared while Kim Hyun-Sung and Cha Hee-Ra were missing, the citizens of Castle Rock would be annihilated. When I thought about how we had to figure out a way, I heard the loud tolling of a bell.

"*Roooooooooar…*"

It was a low cry, but it made me feel a shiver down my spine.

'We're doomed.'

We couldn't see the monster from inside the city, but I knew exactly what was going on. The monster may not be able to fly, but it was only a matter of time before the castle walls fell, and the city would surely be thrown into chaos by then. I wasn't the only one who heard the cry, and just by the voice alone, it was obviously different from an epic-ranked monster. Cha Hee-Ra was still a problem, and the castle walls

needed support.

'We need to stop it.'

"Mr. Hyun-Sung, the walls! We should head to the walls first," I suggested.

"B-But…"

"No, to the west!" I cried out once more.

"What?"

"I don't have time to explain. After taking me to the western area, please take care of the monsters at the castle wall," I told them.

"I-It's dangerous, Oppa," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"The party will head to the castle walls. Miss Hye-Jin will be in charge and we'll focus on stopping the monsters approaching the wall. After dropping Mr. Ki-Young off at the western area, we'll immediately head to the castle walls," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"But—"

"There's no room for discussion. This is the top priority," Kim Hyun-Sung interrupted.

"It'll be fine, Ha-Yan," I said, consoling Jung Ha-Yan.

Jung Ha-Yan was surprised, but Kim Hyun-Sung probably thought I had an idea since he spoke after nodding toward me quietly.

When Kim Hyun-Sung approached me, he grabbed my hand and ran toward the western area, and thanks to his agility stats, the scenery quickly changed. It was a bit strange to be in the cozy and warm arms of our regressor, but compared to when Jo Hye-Jin was holding me, his speed was on a whole new level. Cha Hee-Ra screamed as if a villain had taken her lover away, but for her to catch up to Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't going to be easy.

"Do you have something in mind?"

Kim Hyun-Sung must be tired, as he was panting while asking, and it was natural for him to be curious since I suddenly asked him to drop me off at the western area. It could be considered gambling, but there was still another group that could fight within Castle Rock.

"I'm not sure, but… I think we can get help," I replied.

"What?"

"It's someone I met a few days ago…"

"*Huh?*"

I probably sounded like a crazy person because I wasn't sure what I was talking about either, but there was a chance. If that person immediately left after attending the underground auction house, I could be wrong, but the city was immediately thrown into martial law after my return.

'I'm sure they're here.'

The security hadn't only been tight, but Red Mercenary Guild members were scouring every inch of the castle to make sure no one was leaving Castle Rock. It would be different if there were an underground entrance I wasn't aware of, but after investigating the underground auction house, I couldn't find any entrance that led outside. In addition, if that person was still interested in me, they shouldn't leave the city that quickly. It was highly likely that they stayed in the auction house, hoping that we would meet again.

'They're probably here.'

They must have tried to find a way to escape. When I looked through my pocket, I found the note they gave me and even though I didn't think we would meet again, they must have never imagined I would visit them first.

"Are we almost there?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

They were likely nearby. After taking a deep breath, I yelled out the name I didn't want to call out.

"Xiao… lin!"

“What—”

“Xiaolin! Come out!”

The regressor revealed a look of surprise. He seemed like he wanted to ask how I knew that name, but he simply bit his lips and remained quiet.

‘Shit… They know each other.’

It wasn’t the same expression as when he saw Jung Jin-Ho, but it seemed like he had a bad relationship with Xiaolin. After thinking about Xiaolin’s unique habit, she didn’t seem like a righteous person, either…

‘Maybe it’s natural since she’s from the Republic… ’

I could convince him later if I came up with a decent excuse.

“Xiaolin!! Come out!!” I yelled once again.

“Is she really here?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“I’m not sure, but maybe… No, I’m certain she’s here,” I hesitated, but I soon came to a conclusion.

Helpers had appeared in dramatic situations several times today, and if she was listening, I wanted to beg her to come out. There were still thirty-four minutes left until Cha Hee-Ra regained consciousness, and because she was still chasing me, I had no other choice but to do this. I couldn’t run away for thirty-four minutes while in Kim Hyun-Sung’s arms. I had managed to run away up until now, but there had been some close calls. In addition, seeing her chase after me like a madwoman scared me.

All of a sudden, there was an explosion.

“*Ah.*”

“I didn’t think we’d meet so soon… and during a situation like this… So what should I call you? Masked Man? Does that work?”

The same woman I met last time was standing on top of a building, and the fact that she was still wearing the Chinese dress was impressive. She called herself beautiful

and seeing her without a mask proved that she *really* was beautiful. I smiled when I saw her.

'This is it!'

A crazy woman going up against a crazy beast was the best-case scenario, and a famous saying I had heard before started playing in my head.

'The balance of power must be maintained!'

"It's an honor to see you again, beautiful Miss Xiaolin," I started.

My warm greeting seemed to have sent her into a fluster.

CHAPTER 176
INSTINCTIVE LIONESS (3)

“It’s an honor to see you again, beautiful Miss Xiaolin…”.

She looked a bit flustered by my warm greeting.

“Is that so? But… I don’t think I’ve met you before, so how do you know my name?” Xiaolin asked.

“I couldn’t forget your beautiful figure when I saw you that night. I’ve been searching for you,” I replied.

“Lies…”

“I’m not lying, Miss Xiaolin,” I told her.

“*Ha*…”

“Didn’t you come out because you wanted to help?” I asked.

“I don’t feel all that great because you dumped me once… To be exact, I came out here to see how the man who dumped me was going to die,” she casually stated.

‘This sly bitch!’

I knew she was going to act like this, but still…

‘I’m sure she’ll help.’

If she didn’t want to, she wouldn’t have shown herself like this. The reason she was playing hard to get was probably that she wanted to make a deal with me. Xiaolin might be part of the Republic, but she answered my call by appearing at the heart of the Holy Empire, so in some ways, she was breaking the rules. Even though Kim Hyun-Sung, me and the crazy Cha Hee-Ra were the only ones who had seen her, I guess she could see herself benefiting from all this. Thinking that she came out just

to see me made me feel overly self-conscious, but based on her reaction in the underground auction house, there was a chance she might help. The fact that she wanted to negotiate with me was undeniable proof.

'Although, I don't know what kind of negotiation she's thinking… '

I felt a bit flustered by our lovely regressor's reaction because not only was he looking at Xiaolin angrily, but he wasn't looking at me kindly. He wasn't being hostile, but he looked as if he wanted an explanation. When she called me the Masked Man, I instantly came up with a decent excuse.

"We met at a masquerade," I told him.

"*Oh…* I see," Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

"While the party was out on an expedition, Miss Hye-Jin and I met her," I added.

Jo Hye-Jin should confirm the alibi.

"You went with Miss Hye-Jin?" he asked.

"I recall rejecting her because she made a difficult request. I didn't think she remained in the city, so I'm relieved she stayed here. Do you know her?" I asked him.

"No… I don't know her," he said.

While I was trying to convince Kim Hyun-Sung, I heard Xiaolin speaking, "Are you going to ignore me after calling for me? Is it okay if I just leave then?"

"O-Of course not! No need to feel upset, Miss Xiaolin. I'm really sorry about last time. My partner back then was a bit sensitive about my safety…" I told her.

I felt bad about making Jo Hye-Jin into a delusional person, but making a good impression on Xiaolin was more important than anything, and even as we were talking, Cha Hee-Ra was still charging toward us.

"I recall you being the uncomfortable one back then." Xiaolin pointed out.

"*Hahaha*. Why would I refuse a beauty? Don't you think the fault is on the mask for covering my subordinate and your beautiful face? I knew you were beautiful, but

you're more beautiful than I thought. I feel like I'm going to fall deep into your eyes," I told her.

"Bullshit," Xiaolin called out.

"Why would I lie to you?" I asked her.

"That's because you're desperate right now," she casually said.

"People usually become fond of each other during a desperate situation, and all the main characters in movies usually end up with each other that way. How about helping out instead of watching? We're not in the best situation—" I explained.

"I don't have a problem helping, but asking me to stop the berserk Mercenary Queen is quite an expensive request… I don't even know whether I'll be able to stop her, so we need to negotiate something," she interrupted.

"I'm not asking you to fight her with everything you have. I'll be very grateful if you just stay with us for thirty minutes… I'll do my best to fulfill your requests. Of course, that includes getting out of Castle Rock safely," I told her.

"*Hm…* thirty minutes. It wouldn't be that easy," she mumbled.

"How about gold coins?"

"Well…"

"If you want materials…" I added.

"I have money…".

"How about I treat you to something nice? Not only that, but I'll fulfill whatever wish you have to the best of my abilities," I said, sweetening the pot.

"*Hm…*"

"Please help, beautiful and noble Miss Xiaolin."

"Then… since it seems urgent, shall we establish the contract with this?" she asked.

“Under the condition that you subdue instead of killing her,” I stated.

“You don’t have to worry about that. She won’t die unless I’m trying to kill her. As for that crazy gorilla… It wouldn’t be so bad to have that gorilla be indebted to me, so it’s beneficial for me too,” Xiaolin explained.

I wasn’t sure how, but she knew Cha Hee-Ra. If Xiaolin had a high position somewhere, then it was possible she met Cha Hee-Ra at one point, as the latter represented the Holy Empire.

‘Is this good?’

No matter what happened, the fact that she would stop Cha Hee-Ra was the most important. Even though it seemed like they had a bad relationship…

‘It’s not bad.’

When Xiaolian quietly extended her hand out, a man appeared and quietly handed her a weapon inside a chest. After grabbing the weapon quietly, she stretched the weapon out.

‘A whip?’

It seemed like Cha Hee-Ra wasn’t worried about her. As Cha Hee-Ra continued charging toward me, Xiaolian locked a massive amount of magic onto her. With the sound of something splitting the air, Cha Hee-Ra’s body was pushed to the left.

Booooooom!

When I heard the loud sound, I couldn’t help but stare at Xiaolin in a daze.

‘Is she really that strong?’

I didn’t look at her stats properly before, so obviously, I looked at her again.

[Checking Player Xiaolin’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Xiaolin]

[Title - Sadist]

[Age - 22]

[Nature - Curious Explorer]

[Unique Habit - A Strangling Romantist]

[Job - Whip Expert - Epic Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic swordsmanship knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate whip knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced martial arts knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced whip knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced magic operation knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 87/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 89/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 71/Above rare growth limit]

[Intelligence - 81/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 64/Above rare growth limit]

[Luck - 81/Below epic growth limit]

[Magic - 89/Above epic growth limit]

[Attribute - Enthusiastic Whipping - Epic Rank]

[Recovers HP in proportion to the damage dealt with the whip.]

[Overall Review - Although her stamina and endurance stats are low, she has stats that support the basics. I would like to applaud her for the fact that she can continuously recover her health through her attribute. Her nature is great, but not her habit. She's a player that may discover something new by being curious about dangerous things. I'm sure she's not someone you want to get close to.]

Xiaolin was *strong,* but she wasn't strong enough to fight against Cha Hee-Ra, as there was a big difference between their strength. She didn't seem *very* strong based on her overall stats, but what bothered me a bit was her whip.

[Gear - Urd, The Whip That Punished The Goddess - Legendary Rank]

[A weapon discovered in an ancient temple. No one knows who or how it was used, but many believe the whip was used to punish the goddess. Even though it was buried for a long time, it still possesses most of its powers. The owner of the item will have 10 random stat points permanently decreased, and in return, the magic of the whip will increase.]

'I knew it… '

I knew Xiaolin had something up her sleeves, but I had never imagined she possessed a legendary item. It seems like most of its functions was still inactive, but there was a big difference between the whip and my Juliena because Juliena wasn't awake yet. I finally understood why she agreed to stop Cha Hee-Ra for a short period of time.

'Her stat points are permanently decreased by ten points… '

The whip had to be powerful enough that sacrificing ten stat points was worth it. It seemed like her subordinates weren't going to participate in the battle. I was certain they would protect her if she ended up in a dangerous situation, but since Cha Hee-Ra wasn't near us just yet, Xiaolin was able to fight her on her own.

The explosions continued as the buildings around us fell.

"*Grrrrr!*"

When Cha Hee-Ra felt a direct threat to her life, she no longer looked at me. She immediately jumped out of a building and shot toward the crazy woman with the whip. I guess Kim Hyun-Sung thought he no longer had to carry me around, as he immediately headed toward the wall, but I wasn't planning on going with him.

"I think you can head to the wall first. There's something else I need to take care of…" I told him.

"What?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"I have insurance in mind. *Oh!* Could you send over the Red Mercenary Guild members here? I think I should be fine now, but whenever we get into this kind of situation, we have to stop one of them," I explained.

"I think I understand. I'll head over to the wall then," he said.

"Okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

"Also…"

"Yes?"

"I'd appreciate it if you could explain what's going on today in detail," he requested.

"Of course…" I answered.

'I'm sure he's suspicious.'

In addition to knowing a powerful woman of the Republic, I even knew where she was and had asked for her help. Of course, I obviously had no idea where she lived or what she had been doing, but I did yell her name out, and she responded to it. Honestly, I completely forgot about our meeting back in the underground auction house.

Manipulating the monsters in a way that they would slightly break through the western area was part of the plan. Of course, we were going to push them back at once after they had invaded this area. However, the troops in the western area must have been reinforced by now, as the guild master of the Giant Guild was in command. I wasn't sure what would happen, but I didn't have to worry about this place getting destroyed in the meantime.

"*Roooooooooooar!*"

Of course, it would be a different story if those crazy monsters outside could fly…

"I'll see you later," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Okay, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

Our lovely regressor must've been worried as well because he immediately left. The defense war and raid were probably still happening outside the castle, and even though there probably wouldn't be any problems, I had to make one more stop just in case.

'I am scared to go outside, though… '

Since Xiaolin might pull something on Cha Hee-Ra, I decided to watch her while hiding until the Red Mercenary Guild members arrived. While it was difficult to imagine Cha Hee-Ra dying or getting hurt…

'Anything can still happen.'

For now, watching Xiaolin's every move was the right thing to do.

"Crazy bitch!" Xiaolin yelled.

"*Grrrrrr!*"

There was a crazy battle of monsters. I initially thought the defense war would end even if I just ordered and pointed with my fingers from the back, but I couldn't help but be upset when I realized I was going through hardships despite being in the back.

CHAPTER 177
INSTINCTIVE LIONESS (4)

I initially thought the defense war would end even if I just moved my fingers from the back, but when I realized I was going through hardships despite being in the back, I couldn't help but be upset.

Even though the situation seemed to be improving, I couldn't relax. The situation may be going back to what we had planned, but there was still a lot of uncertainty. The western wall that was supposed to collapse and the existence of the legendary-ranked raid monster known as Cha Hee-Ra were the reasons for the uncertainty. Considering that it had been some time since the baby's first howling, and the existing troops were holding up pretty well, I realized that there was a high chance the defense war would end without any hiccups. The castle wall where Kim Hyun-Sung would go would certainly have their morale boosted as well.

'However... '

Thinking about the worst-case scenario was the right thing to do because war was unpredictable. After all, the worst-case scenario happened with Cha Hee-Ra, and the baby's howl.

'The more insurance you have, the better.'

To resolve this crisis, I had to think constantly, and since there was a limit to what I could do, I had to keep thinking about the cards I could use.

When I looked back while gulping, the battle of the monsters was still in progress, and even though Xiaolin was strong, I finally understood why she said she wasn't confident about killing Cha Hee-Ra. Her legendary-ranked whip, Urd, was strong, and every time she used it, it destroyed the smaller buildings with a loud whipping noise. But after the first surprise attack, Cha Hee-Ra didn't allow a second attack to land on her.

"*Grrrr!*"

Cha Hee-Ra moved one step ahead of the explosion, and the way she kept dodging didn't make her seem like someone whose agility was 90. She could only move that fast, as she was no longer conscious, and all that remained in her were her instincts. Even though I was watching her, she was just…

'…using her senses.'

Her senses and instincts, to be exact. It wasn't something someone could achieve through training, and just like Jung Ha-Yan, Cha Hee-Ra was also a genius. I was sure it would be faster to find someone without special talents at her level, but among them, Cha Hee-Ra was definitely out of the ordinary.

Xiaolin tried to tie her down while maintaining her distance, but a beast released from its cage wouldn't follow its trainer. I could see so many life-threatening situations even from the sidelines.

'She's not bad… '

It wouldn't be so bad if Cha Hee-Ra ended up ripping Xiaolin to pieces right before the duration of her habit ran out, but if she did end up dying, then there had been no point calling her over here.

'Hold out a bit longer, you bitch!'

Unlike my thoughts, it seemed like Cha Hee-Ra was allowing her to keep her distance. The existence of magic could offset the weapon's flaw a bit, but it wouldn't change the fact that it was still a whip. Xiaolin was at a disadvantage, especially when fighting against a close-range specialist like Cha Hee-Ra. The beast chased its owner who was trying to run away, and when Cha Hee-Ra was about to penetrate her chest, I saw Xiaolin throwing her whip to the side. After getting into a strange pose, she hit Cha Hee-Ra's arm before elbowing her in the abdomen.

'Martial arts?'

She must have used a lot of her strength, as the way Cha Hee-Ra flew away seemed pretty unrealistic.

'Shit… she even knows martial arts… '

It was a well-known prejudice that people who usually wielded weapons were weak

in close combat. Considering that, my reaction was natural.

'Why is she so strong?'

He was still growing, but even the great Kim Hyun-Sung struggled against Cha Hee-Ra.

Xiaolin could be categorized as *strong* because not only did she have a legendary-ranked medium-to-long range weapon, but she was also proficient in close combat. Her stats were a bit lacking, but I wanted to give more points to Xiaolin than to the late Ito Sota, as she could keep up with Cha Hee-Ra.

That must've only been my personal opinion because despite injuring Cha Hee-Ra, Xiaolin didn't seem happy. Cha Hee-Ra must have landed in a weapons shop because when I followed Xiaolin's gaze, I saw the red beast holding two cheap weapons. Now that I thought about it…

'This is my first time seeing Cha Hee-Ra use a weapon… '

Despite acquiring advanced dual weapon knowledge, I didn't know why she wasn't using any weapon, but anyway, it was undeniable that the situation had changed a bit. The person with a weapon had the advantage, and since Xiaolin knew that, she seemed nervous. I started to get worried for her.

"What if she ends up dying?"

I started talking to myself, but I heard someone answering my question.

"It'll be dangerous. She's definitely strong, but—"

"You scared me!" I yelped.

"*Oh…* I'm sorry."

"It's nothing. You came faster than I expected," I commented.

Behind me was the Red Mercenary Group member Kim Hyun-Sung had sent, and when I looked at them, they started talking, "I only brought five members with me because the troops at the wall still need our support. I was told there was something we had to do here, and I have an idea as to why we were sent here."

“The woman wielding the whip is currently stopping Hee-Ra noona, so I would like you to watch to make sure nothing serious happens. I was getting worried that she might get hurt…” I explained.

“I don’t think you need to worry about that, but… protecting the master is our job, so we’ll gladly follow your order. What about that woman?” they asked.

“I know her subordinates are around, and there were about five of them. They seem like they’re from the Republic, but since she agreed to cooperate with us, please watch over her and make sure she doesn’t get hurt. Just make sure she doesn’t die before Hee-Ra noona calms down…” I responded.

“I understand. It’s not easy to stop the master when she’s in that condition, so it would be best to support that woman until the master regains consciousness. I’m a bit relieved, though. Fortunately, she didn’t go to the city where people are, and if it weren’t for that woman, there would’ve been a big accident. She hasn’t been like that recently…” the member remarked.

‘I can’t say that I’m the reason why… ’

“Has she ever gone berserk like that before?” I asked.

“She has gone berserk many times not too long after she arrived on the continent, and once after she created the Red Mercenary Guild. Of course, she wasn’t like this back then…” they replied.

“Back then?”

“I recall her attacking both her enemies and allies, but now, she’s able to differentiate between the two, so that’s a relief…”

If I ended up in that kind of situation, I would make sure to leave Castle Rock.

I was also curious about the castle walls, so the Red Mercenary Guild member answered when I asked them.

“I see. *Oh,* how is the defense war looking?”

“It’s fine. A legendary named monster did appear, but they’re a bit passive.”

"Ah ha…"

"Epic-ranked monsters and lower ranked monsters have been appearing at the castle walls, but the named monster hasn't directly attacked the walls yet. If the named monster decides to charge in, then we're going to take a lot of damage, but since the mages have been saving their mana since the previous encounter, we shouldn't have a problem with the defense war. Killing the monsters at the first wall all at once had been effective…"

I nodded lightly. It was surprising that the named monster wasn't attacking just yet, but other than that, everything was going as planned. Actually, it was easy to figure out why the monster wasn't attacking yet. It would be strange if I didn't smile in this situation.

'I should be able to move more freely now… '

It turned out that I had made the right choice in preparing this insurance.

"How's the west wall looking?" I asked.

"There haven't been any problems there, either. There were some casualties, but the reserve forces were able to fill those spots… but compared to the other castle walls, it lacks firepower… Is there a problem at the west wall?" they asked.

"No, I think it'll be fine. If the situation becomes problematic, you can evacuate to the east," I told them.

"Understood…"

"Is there anyone here that can cast voice amplification magic?" I asked.

"Yes… I can."

I could tell that our regressor was being considerate because even though the Red Mercenary Guild lacked a mage unit, he still sent a mage to me.

'Nice… '

"Excluding the one mage, the remaining can carry out the task I had explained earlier. Once Hee-Ra noona calms down…"

“There won’t be any other side effects. She’ll return to her normal self,” a member answered.

“That’s a relief. Then, I’ll give the signal,” I told them.

“What kind of signal?” they asked.

“You can hear it from Hee-Ra noona. I’ll be heading to the Small Stone Guild’s Guildhouse right now. I should be safe, so there’s no need to escort me,” I told them.

“Please take at least one person with you…” they suggested.

They seemed very worried about my safety. I was sure it was because of Cha Hee-Ra’s order, but I was still thankful for their concerns. When I nodded quietly, a warrior and a mage grouped up with me.

‘Only 15 minutes left… ’

I felt good since Miss Xiaolin was fighting hard for me, and I was able to watch their fight and move safely at the same time. I felt comfortable knowing that I had people protecting me.

Before leaving, the mage of the Red Mercenary Guild activated a simple illusion spell just in case we got caught by Cha Hee-Ra, but she was no longer paying attention to me.

There were still explosions and roars all over the place when we silently left, but overall, I felt at ease and significantly better.

‘The puzzle pieces are coming together… ’

When I started running, the scenery slowly started to change.

I was sure Cha Hee-Ra had forgotten about my presence, as she was too busy fighting Xiaolin, but she must’ve gotten angry when she realized I wasn’t there anymore since an even louder explosion rang out. But I couldn’t worry about that for now…

‘10 minutes left… ’

“Are you able to run while carrying me?” I asked.

“Of course…”

I felt bad for the warrior I was going to physically burden, but this was going to let me get there a lot faster. Since the Small Stone Guild’s Guildhouse was far from the western area, it would take a while.

‘Two minutes left… ’

Kim Hyun-Sung would have already arrived at the guild house, but since the warrior had invested in endurance and strength instead of agility, this speed could be considered decent for him. When the scenery changed once again, I noticed the lovely Red Mercenary Guild occupying the Small Stone Guild’s Guildhouse.

Cha Hee-Ra noona must’ve regained her consciousness, as the explosions disappeared. Moments later, I thought I heard Cha Hee-Ra’s scream, but it would be better to pretend that I didn’t hear anything.

When we got closer to the guild house, one of the members came to meet me and I started talking to them, “You’re here.”

“*Oh,* Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

“Yes, but what brings you here…” they asked.

“The monster’s baby that has just hatched is here, right?” I asked.

I kind of felt like trash doing this, but this was the most efficient way of doing things.

The Red Mercenary Guild members hesitantly brought out the baby. It somewhat looked like a dragon, but it had no wings. To be precise, something was attached to its forelimbs, but it wasn’t designed to fly. Well, it didn’t matter how the baby looked.

When I took off the baby’s muzzle, the baby’s sad cries filled the city.

“*Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaah*…”

Booooom!

The baby's mother destroyed the west wall and looked *right* in my direction.

"You can stare at me all you want! *Hahahaha!*"

CHAPTER 178
THE RAMIFICATIONS OF HOSTAGE TAKING (1)

"You can stare at me all you want! *Hahahaha!*"

My assumption was correct. I guess the mother didn't expect me to take her baby hostage, as she looked confused despite her bold entrance. I was sure I looked like a scumbag for taking a baby hostage, but this situation was beautiful.

"*Roooooooar*…"

I noticed the mother trying to move, so when I slowly moved Juliena toward the poor baby, not only did she stop, but the other monsters she sent here stopped as well. It was as if someone had activated a restraining spell on them.

'Is she holding them back?'

The mother was more reasonable than I thought, and thanks to her, I was able to look at her more carefully. She was bigger than I thought—she was big enough that I could see the details on her body from afar. She had horns that weren't obviously there as decorations since she had just used that to destroy the west wall.

'People will pay a fortune for it.'

Her horns weren't the only expensive-looking part of her body. Her black glossy hide looked intimidating, and even from afar, I could clearly see that spells under rare-rank would simply bounce off of it. If we made a shield out of her skin, I was sure it would mitigate any monster's attack. She was a *real* dragon, and her tail was impressive.

'I think we can make a weapon out of her tail… '

I had never heard that dragons in fairy tales existed here, but I guess it wasn't the type of monster that would use its magic to rule humans. I could feel an immense amount of mana from her. I didn't know whether all legendary-ranked monsters were like her, but I saw emotions in her eyes. She seemed intelligent enough to be

classified as an intellectual being. Moreover, I was certain she possessed motherly love.

When I looked at her using Mind's Eye, I immediately saw her information.

[Black Dragon Dialugia - Legendary Rank]

[A legendary-ranked monster living in the deepest part of the Rockrevel Mountains. As a dragon-type monster, she possesses a certain level of intelligence and uses her large horn and long tail to hunt mid-sized or larger monsters.]

[Checking Legendary-Ranked Named Monster Black Dragon Dialugia's Status Window.]

[Name - Dialugia]

[Title - Ruler of the Rockrevel Mountains]

[Age - 4,036]

[Nature - A Gentle Mother]

[Race - Dragon]

[Stats]

[Strength - 105/Above legendary growth limit]

[Agility - 101/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 123/Above legendary growth limit]

[Intelligence - 100/Above legendary growth limit]

[Endurance - 132/Above legendary growth limit]

[Luck - 101/Below legendary growth limit]

[Magic - 125/Above legendary growth limit]

[Overall Review - Dialugia is very angry because her child was taken away. She's filled with rage, so please be careful.]

'Her stats are… '

Dialugia's stats were ridiculously high, and even if I assumed that the stats of humans and monsters were calculated differently, her stats were still much higher than I had imagined.

Cha Hee-Ra's strength points were higher than Dialugia, but the two were in a whole new realm altogether. I was sure that with a body like Dialugia, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that she could use her strength more effectively than Cha Hee-Ra. Dialugia's endurance was 132, and her magic was 125. I had never raided a legendary-ranked named monster before, but I was starting to doubt whether the force of one city could even defeat her.

'I'm sure it's possible… '

If we were to actually fight her head on, then Castle Rock might be slightly—no, Castle Rock would be at a really big disadvantage, but… I was holding her precious baby hostage.

The legendary monster remained silent, and the overwhelming mood it gave off silenced Castle Rock, but it wasn't a problem. Her intelligence was *really* helpful, and I easily figured out why she wasn't moving so aggressively from the get-go. She could have used her massive tail to destroy buildings, or she could have used her breath to puncture a hole in the castle wall, but she didn't do any of these.

'It's all because she wasn't sure of her baby's location… '

The baby crying sadly next to me was fragile, and I was certain Dialugia was afraid that something would happen to her precious baby. If she was *that* smart, why would I fight her head-on?

When the mother who had destroyed the west wall in anger suddenly became silent while looking at me, the soldiers became flustered. They were probably trying to

figure out why this extraordinary monster suddenly stopped moving, and whether something else was going to happen or not. Naturally, it was my job to order these soldiers who had no idea what to do. I found it amusing how they reacted immediately as soon as I spoke.

“Everyone! Let’s protect Castle Rock!”

My voice reached the castle walls thanks to the voice amplification spell, and it only took a moment for the confused soldiers to cry out.

“She’s nothing but a monster. We must show this invading, dirty monster just how powerful we are! The defense unit should prepare a shield spell in case of an emergency while the remaining soldiers in the front will attack the monster. Focus our spells and arrows on her right arm! Close combat soldiers will protect the long-ranged soldiers by removing the monsters on the walls!” I exclaimed

“*Ahhhhhhhh!*”

“Victory is ours! Everyone! Charge!” I ordered.

It only took a moment for the colorful and flashy spells to land on Dialugia. Her stats were high, but I was sure that receiving this many attacks at once would pierce her skin, and I couldn’t help but smile when I saw her stagger. This couldn’t be considered a raid, as she was being a sandbag. She thought about using her tail to defend herself, but when she saw Juliena floating around her precious baby, she must’ve realized what it meant because she didn’t defend herself or fight back.

“*Kyaaaaaah*…”

The baby cried out once again, and I wasn’t sure whether it recognized its mother or not, but its cry sounded sad. If Dialugia were a dumb monster, she could have just charged at us without a care for her baby, which would make the situation more difficult. Still, her baby’s sad cries must be affecting her mentally, and this was a good way to teach a naive monster like her a lesson.

It was really fun to see spells and arrows landing on her without stopping.

“Hold on just a little longer! Everyone! The enemy isn’t able to fight back right now. Victory is ours!” I yelled.

'She can't fight back!'

"Castle Rock will forever remember today's victory! Everyone! This victory was achieved through sacrifice! Let's push a little more!" I encouraged them with another yell.

'This is the power of the lord of all creatures! You uncivilized monster!'

"Let's protect our hometown!" I added.

My heart started to pound when I thought about how much money I was going to make, and of course, I did feel bad. Our dear Dialugia looked miserable as more and more attacks landed on her. She probably thought that fighting back would be crossing the limit, as every time she made even the slightest movement, her precious baby was threatened. It seemed as if she was unaware that dying meant her baby would die next. Still, even if she was aware, her motherly love meant there was nothing she could do.

After all, no parent would want to see their child getting hurt.

'Geez… I feel kind of bad… '

I felt a tiny; no, a pea-sized bit of sympathy, but I had no intentions of stopping here. If I didn't do this in the first place, then we would have to deal with a lot of trouble just trying to capture that monster. There was an easy way to win this, so there was no point in fighting fair and square since half of Castle Rock could die doing that, and we could even end up getting pushed back if we did. I did feel bad about snatching her baby and for threatening the gentle mother, but I had no other choice.

The soldiers must've thought it was time to kill the monster because the close-ranged soldiers started to stab her with their swords. Dialugia looked so lifeless that it was hard to believe she was a legendary-ranked named monster.

All of a sudden, I saw her looking at me in silence.

'What… '

Before I could blink, I felt a strange energy that was different from mana flowing into me.

'What's this… '

There wasn't anything wrong with my body, but it was ridiculous how I started to feel lethargic, like energy was flowing out of me. Naturally, I was worried that this was one of her tricks, so when I thought about setting an example by cutting off her baby's leg, a status window popped up.

[A title has been created.]

[Dragon's Spouse]

'What… in the hell?'

[This title is only bestowed upon the chosen spouse of the dragon who will live together and die together on the same day and time. You have been chosen to be Dialugia's spouse. As her spouse, you will live and die with her. Your magic will increase by five points.]

'Shit… '

No wonder I was starting to feel weak.

'Damn it… '

I was happy that my magic had increased by five, but I immediately realized I was about to die. When I hurriedly looked at Dialugia, I noticed the players doing a victory cheer as they were gathering their energy to release Castle Rock's final blow. However, their attack would only end up killing me.

"S-Stop the attack! Stop the attack! Stop!" I quickly cried out.

I was sure she would survive when I recalled how many endurance points she had, but I couldn't help but worry since my life was also on the line.

The soldiers must've understood my order because they stopped channeling their

spells. Dialugia was swaying as if she would die at any minute now. She must've fainted because she wasn't moving anymore, but I couldn't see her clearly because the building was covering her. Naturally, I started to worry that some crazy guy was going to try and land the final blow because he wanted the experience points.

'N-No… '

"Go to where the monster is!" I ordered.

"What?"

"I'm going to go to where the monster is right now," I repeated.

"*Oh…* understood."

'How many times have I been going back and forth today?'

The scenery changed as I was being held by one of the Red Mercenary Guild members while I was holding the baby in my arms. I had gotten so used to being in someone else's arms that I felt comfortable, but the war situation had changed once more.

Perhaps, it was because Dialugia had fainted, but the monsters that had remained as sandbags were starting to become reckless.

"Capture the named monster! Focus on cleaning up the monsters outside the castle walls!" I commanded them.

'Please don't kill her… '

"I'll say it again! Capture the named monster! Focus on cleaning up the monsters outside the castle walls! After sealing the destroyed wall with defense magic, we'll return to protecting the castle! Capture the named monster!" I yelled again.

'Why don't I see her?'

Despite almost reaching the western area, I couldn't see even Dialugia's shadow, and even after I jumped out of the guild member's arms, I still couldn't see her. Actually, I saw what looked like a human being, but with large horns on her head. I noticed her looking at me sadly as she was being overpowered by some of the troops. I was a bit

flustered, but I immediately realized that this woman was Dialugia.

“M-My child!” she yelled.

I obviously looked like the villain, and she looked like the victim.

“You were safe… my child… you were safe all this time…” she mumbled.

I couldn’t help but yell urgently when I saw her spitting blood.

“H-Hands off! You bastards!”

CHAPTER 179
THE RAMIFICATIONS OF HOSTAGE TAKING (2)

I couldn't help but yell urgently when I saw her spitting blood.

"H-Hands off! You bastards!"

I reacted furiously because Dialugia looked like she was about to die, and my shouting must have sent the troops surrounding her in a panic because they quickly looked at me. They seemed curious, but I didn't have time to explain.

"Return to the front line immediately. I'll take her into custody myself," I ordered.

"Understood!"

These soldiers could do nothing other than leave.

I wasn't sure if she could recover with the potion I brought with me, but to treat the woman who looked like she was on the brink of death while crying for her baby, there was only one thing I could do. When I approached her while carrying her baby, she kept reaching her hand out, and even though I was worried about her attacking me, I didn't think there would be a problem when I saw her status window.

'I was tricked.'

Setting aside the fact that she could transform into a human form, I had never imagined that she had the ability to connect my life with hers. I had no choice but to acknowledge that Dialugia had made a smart move. She must have thought that her baby would most likely die after she died, so she tried to save her life by selecting me as her spouse while I was holding her baby hostage and ordering the soldiers with voice amplification magic. I wasn't sure if she discovered I wasn't the type of person to sacrifice myself for mankind, but her bet was a success. After all, I didn't want to make a noble sacrifice.

Dialugia realized that her survival meant her baby would survive, and the most reasonable method was to hold me hostage. She couldn't harm me, as that would put

her baby in danger, so her best option was to make me her spouse, which meant that we would live and die together.

'I didn't have enough data… '

Even though I lacked information on dragons, there were four things I had figured out. This didn't apply to the entire dragon race, but it did apply to Dialugia.

1. A female dragon could have a baby on their own.

Gender could be meaningless to them, and considering their population, there was a high chance my assumption was correct.

2. Dragons had the ability to change into human form.

It wasn't magic. It could be an ability unique to the race.

3. I wasn't sure if it was a contract, magic, or the race's unique ability, but a dragon had the ability to choose its spouse.

I had no idea if I could resist it, but since my resistance was low, it was meaningless to even talk about it.

4. The couple lived and died together.

I didn't know how to explain it, but this was an undeniable fact.

'My body was proof of that.'

I couldn't understand, but I knew they weren't simple monsters. They were intelligent beings that had their own culture and way of life. They were the kind of creatures that had evolved differently from humans.

'I guess they could be called higher-level beings?'

I had a lot of research to do, but saving Dialugia was a priority, so when I poured the potion over her injuries, I noticed her slowly recovering. However, it wasn't very

effective. Since she had an enormous body, there must've been a limit to how fast she could recover while being in her human form. If a bottle of potion was enough to treat an ordinary human, treating this dragon had to take at least a few hundred bottles. She seemed like she was losing consciousness, but the small potion must've helped her because it seemed that she was regaining consciousness. Dialugia instantly turned her attention to the baby I was holding.

"M-My baby!"

"*Kyaaaaah*…"

I thought about reuniting them during this touching moment, but I wasn't sure how she would act, so I had no choice but to keep my distance from her. It was then that I heard her sad voice.

"P-Please give my baby back. Give… my child… back, please."

'Shit… '

"I beg you! Please, give me back my child. Please…" She begged once again.

'Stop crying… '

"Please…"

Dialugia's eyes overflowed with tears, which made me look like a piece of shit. I expected her to charge at me like what Cha Hee-Ra had done, but she must've realized her place because she was kneeling on the ground. I thought that she might use her life to threaten me, but it was the opposite. Selecting me as her spouse must have been her last resort.

'Is this her actual personality?'

My assumption was most likely correct since her nature was a gentle mother. Since she had never invaded Castle Rock even once during the 4,000 years that she had been alive made me think that she was *actually* here for her child.

'Song Jung-Wook, you shitty bastard.'

I could only blame Song Jung-Wook so that I could feel less guilty.

While I had no idea what to do, a member of the Red Mercenary Guild started talking.

“Is she…”

“It’s the monster we saw just now. I guess she can transform into a human form,” I answered.

“I’ve never heard of such a thing…” they commented.

“I don’t believe it either. I never knew this was even possible. I’m sure this child is the reason why she invaded Castle Rock,” I explained.

“I-I see…” they said.

“We’re currently in the middle of defending the castle. I’ll first take that monster; no, that woman into custody. How’s the defense looking?” I asked.

“It looks like the majority of the monsters have been taken care of,” they answered.

“That’s a relief…”

Dialugia kept talking to me even while I was talking with the Red Mercenary Guild member. Honestly, it was difficult to ignore her. I felt bad even when she was still in her monster form, and now that she was in her human form, I felt even worse. I started to think about a sad scenario, and seeing it from her point of view made me feel the absurdity of this situation. In addition to her egg being stolen, her baby was taken hostage as soon as it hatched, and she was even almost beaten to death.

“P-Please give me back my baby…” Dialugia begged.

“…”

“Baby… I’m your mom. Your mom…” she said to her child.

“…”

“Everything will be fine. Don’t worry. Don’t worry about anything… child,” she added.

“…”

“My child…”

“*Kyaaah*…”

I honestly wanted to avoid giving her baby back, but I couldn’t ignore the sight before me, as she looked like a mess. I thought about the possibility of her turning back into her dragon form and backstabbing us after giving her child back, but…

‘It’s unlikely… ’

Dialugia had almost lost all her ability to fight, and even though I had poured my potion over her, it was nothing more than first aid.

Since she knew that her baby would follow her in death, I knew nothing would happen even if I gave her baby back to her. I had to maintain a good relationship with her for the future, so it wouldn’t be bad to let her hold her baby. When I slowly handed her baby back to her, she immediately snatched and hugged her baby despite her injuries.

“My baby… my child!” Dialugia yelled.

“*Kyah!*”

One of the Red Mercenary Guild members couldn’t help but ask, “Will it be okay?”

“There won’t be any problems. She has almost lost all her ability to fight, and nothing would change just because she’s holding her baby. It’ll actually help her mentally,” I replied.

“I see…” they said, nodding.

Dialugia’s mental state was starting to stabilize. After holding her baby, she became wary that her child might be taken away again, but she showed no signs of doing anything else. She was being more reasonable than I had imagined, so I thought it wouldn’t be bad to exchange a few words with her. When I cautiously talked, she looked at me. The horns on her head and her eyes proved that she wasn’t human.

“Can you understand me?” I asked her.

“…”

“Hello?” I asked again.

I heard her answer a few moments later.

“I can understand…”

“That’s a relief. We should introduce ourselves first. My name is Lee Ki-Young,” said.

“Dialugia…” she mumbled.

“I think there has been a misunderstanding. I’d like to explain everything, but this isn’t the best time for that, so please follow the protocol for now,” I told her.

“…”

“You may not believe me, but we’re not the ones who stole your child. From our point of view, *ahem*… you attacked us first.” I pointed out.

“…”

“If you don’t follow our rules, we may have to resort to violence. Of course, that’s under the condition that your child will be safe during the entire process. I promise that no harm will come to your child,” I explained.

“I-I can’t trust a human’s promise…” she said.

“You don’t have a choice in that matter. You have to follow my orders,” I added.

“*Oh…*”

It was natural for her to keep being suspicious of me because if I were her, I would be suspicious of everyone around me. I used Mind’s Eye again, as I thought it would be easier to talk to her if I knew more about her.

[Checking Legendary-Ranked Monster, Dialugia’s Unique Habit.]

[The Giving Tree]

'Huh?'

Since Dialugia's existence was dangerous, I was worried that she was like Jung Ha-Yan or Cha Hee-Ra, but I was surprised by her *ordinary* habit.

'Not bad… '

I couldn't really figure out the situation just now, but when I saw her habit, different ideas started to pop into my head. She was a gentle mother and a giving tree. I couldn't remember the last time I saw someone with a *normal* personality and nature, so I couldn't help but think how great she was.

When I remembered the dragon's stats and her abilities, I felt reassured. The fact that we were sharing a life could be a big advantage for me, and even though I wasn't sure whether I would live a longer life or not, Dialugia *had* to live for her child. If I died, her precious child would be in danger, so she might care for my life more than I did.

Dialugia had the ability to create a monster wave. In addition, she possessed an enormous amount of magic, and she was even able to break through the west wall in an instant with her steel horns and tail. Moreover, she was intelligent.

'The dragon's spouse!'

Magic was a difficult stat to raise on my own, but I had just acquired five points.

'Moreover… '

There wasn't an alchemist lucky enough to conduct research on a living dragon. If she cooperated, then I could acquire her scale and horns for free. A living test subject was more difficult to acquire than a corpse. I probably wouldn't be able to do anything violent to her, as we were sharing a life, but I couldn't deny that she would be *very* helpful.

It only took a moment for my frown to turn into a smile. Dialugia looked at me with slight confusion about my sudden change of mood. When I cautiously helped her up and gently grabbed her shoulder, she flinched, but she stood up all the way.

"I'll keep my promise," I told her.

“Okay…” she mumbled.

“So many of us died, too,” I added.

“…”

“I understand the situation, but there wasn’t anything both of us could do,” I said.

“I… understand,” she mumbled.

“We’ll put you in custody for now. For us, it’ll be like burying our heads in the sand, but we have to do it for formalities sake. I hope you understand that we’re trying to be as considerate as possible,” I explained.

“And the child…”

“You don’t have to worry about your child’s safety, *hahaha*…” I said with a low laugh.

“…”

“Since it’s technically my child, too. *Hehehe*…” I chuckled.

The situation had been chaotic, but I was sure Dialugia knew what she had done because I saw her face turning pale. Of course, we had to keep this a secret, as there was no reason for the others to know about it. However, the love I had for the child blooming inside me was real, so the one who had suffered a loss was Dialugia, not me.

‘I’ll do my best as your dad!’

CHAPTER 180
THE END OF CASTLE DEFENSE (1)

'I'll do my best as your dad!'

I didn't want this child, but it was insurance that would take care of me in old age.

When I raised my head, I saw Dialugia's mouth was still open in shock—she was at a loss for words. Complicated thoughts probably filled her head as she thought about how to handle this situation, but the answer was already there.

"I'll do my best even though I didn't want this to happen. This is… really…" I said.

"*Ugh*…"

"*Ah!* Let's head in for now. I'll follow you after I've taken care of some business. *Pfft*. I'll see you later. Listen to your mom, my baby," I teasingly said.

"W-Who! Who's baby?!" Dialugia exclaimed.

"What do you mean, who? Anyway, we can talk about the details when I come back. Again, please don't cause a commotion because I don't want to use unnecessary methods. No parent wants to see their child getting hurt. *Hahaha*…" I warned while laughing.

"…"

I quickly left while she looked dumbfounded. If the castle defense were almost over, then I wouldn't need to join them, but as the commander-in-chief of the castle defense, I had to be with the troops when we won the war. Even though I didn't do much, I still had to show off. I wanted to stay with Dialugia and the child, but the Red Mercenary Guild members were enough to protect them. When I nodded at the members to thank them for taking care of the chores, they nodded back like they wanted to tell me not to worry about anything.

'Hm… '

When I walked to the top of the wall, I saw the monsters' corpses at the bottom. Some monsters were still trying to climb the castle walls, drunk with the smell of blood, while the others ran away to the other side of the wall when they realized what was going on. There shouldn't be another wave. Of course, there wouldn't be another wave since Dialugia was in custody. The majority of the troops on top of the walls were exhausted, but when they noticed the number of monsters gradually decreasing, they mustered the remainder of their strength.

"Don't give up!"

"Stay on your toes!"

Boooooooom!

They looked cool killing the monsters while shouting, and when I looked further ahead, I noticed my party moving around the walls as they killed the monsters. Jung Ha-Yan sent her magic all over the place, while Kim Hyun-Sung was decapitating the monsters trying to climb the walls. I started to feel uneasy since I didn't get that much experience points compared to them. My magic wasn't that great, but with the pact I had made with a beast I attacked the monsters while giving orders.

"Tanks move to the collapsed western wall and block the path so that the remaining monsters won't be able to enter!"

I had to show everyone that I was doing something, and the ending was also important.

Crack!

Crack!

"*Roooooooooar!*"

Swoosh!

"*Ahhhhhh!*"

"Stop them!"

The large hand I summoned descended, and the monsters screamed afterward. I was

physically tired, but I still had some mana left in me. Seeing their commander-in-chief panting while using his magic would make everyone look at me as their role model. I was covered in dirt, and even though I got injured while running away, I didn't look any different from the troops defending the castle, so my image became even more authentic. I was showing them that their commander-in-chief was taking the initiative on the battlefield. Of course, this wasn't true, but no one really cared because I looked really dirty, unlike the members of the commanding unit.

As I took my place on top of the castle walls in the front, I thought about using Juliena in front of the others. I did learn how to wield a sword from Kim Hyun-Sung after I had obtained Juliena, but wielding her was still awkward for me. My body would basically be following her movements instead of the opposite. After cutting off the head of a small monster that was trying to climb, I used voice amplification magic and yelled.

"Don't let your guard down until the end! For the mages who are out of mana, take up a sword or spear and for the priests who are out of holy magic, start throwing rocks at the monsters. This is our hometown!"

Of course, it *wasn't* my hometown.

"Victory is at hand!" I added.

This was an undeniable fact. The soldiers beside me grabbed spears and started stabbing the monsters beneath us. I even thought I looked kind of cool about how I was fighting with the soldiers.

'Nice… '

"Hold out just a bit longer! My comrades!" I yelled.

"Commander."

I encouraged the soldiers by patting their shoulders or cheering them on.

"The Small Stone Guild's sacrifice must not be in vain!" I shouted.

I had to mention Song Jung-Wook, who was almost forgotten by now.

Suddenly, a small monster charged toward the soldier beside me, and even though I

only thought about it for a moment, I didn't think it would hurt *that* bad to get bitten by it. When I pushed the soldier aside, the monster naturally attacked me. When I raised my hand, I felt its sharp teeth digging into my arm, but I felt proud of what I had done.

'Shit, it really hurts.'

This was my first injury in this defense war.

The moment I let go of Juliena, the sword flew and penetrated the monster biting me, and I saw the soldier I saved in a panic.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! We must treat your wounds…" they exclaimed.

"This is nothing. No need to use your holy magic," I said.

"T-The potion…" the soldier mentioned.

I had one, but I wasn't dumb enough to use it immediately.

"I'll be fine. Holy magic and potions should be used on those with serious injuries. I can handle this kind of injury," I told them.

"M-Mr. Lee Ki-Young…"

"You need to survive so you can reunite with your family," I said encouragingly.

"Yes…" the soldier answered in a low voice.

If my endurance stat was a bit higher, I wouldn't be able to fake the blood, so this was enough to complete my image as the commander who fought beside them. I was sure I looked awful while swinging my sword with one arm.

'This is great.'

It hurt like hell, but it was beautiful. I could still move my arm, but letting it dangle would be more effective for my image. I didn't ask the others to look at me, and instead, I fought desperately in the area that seemed safe. Even though I wasn't as skilled as our lovely regressor, I was moving around the battlefield energetically. When some priests offered to treat me, I shook my head.

“This is nothing…”

“Commander…” A priest called out sadly.

Moreover, I even took my potions out and treated the others. It wasn’t much, but touching stories like this would benefit me in the future.

‘There’s a lot of injured people… ’

But it seemed like everyone could take care of the monsters, and at some point, the cries of humans became louder than the monsters’ roars. They realized that victory was at hand, and the battle’s victor had already been decided even before I joined the fight. Unlike the soldiers busy killing monsters, I could see the overall situation, and I knew that the monsters were being pushed back.

“*Ahhhhhhhhh!*”

“Don’t let your guard down!”

The archers who ran out of arrows grabbed a sword and started stabbing the monsters, and the warriors were now using their blunt swords like axes to beat the mid-sized monsters.

“*Ahhhhhhhhhhh!*”

The majority of the soldiers felt certain of our victory. The soldiers at the third wall who were done killing monsters dropped their weapons and started cheering. The people at the fourth and second walls dropped their weapons and hugged each other. I also wanted to celebrate our victory, but I had to head over to the area with monsters to show the people there my pitiful state. They were almost done, but I had to be with them until the very end.

I guess I pushed it too much because I was running out of breath. However, it didn't matter because my party members, who unlike me had pure intentions, started running over toward me. When I sent Juliena off, she sliced through the neck of the monster a soldier was fighting.

‘Nice!’

When the soldier’s eyes landed on me, he saw his benefactor holding his injured arm.

I didn't have to breathe hard to show I was out of breath. I guess I was really exhausted because I was collecting my breath without realizing it, but this was all part of the scene and a part of the touching stories to tell.

'Another touching story to add to the pile!'

The more beautiful stories I had, the better it was for the evaluation that was going to take place later.

"Th-Thank you," the soldier said.

"It was nothing…" I replied.

Kim Hyun-Sung was also probably busy running around. Monsters were being killed one by one, and I started hearing people cheering from almost all the walls. The soldiers even managed to take care of the monsters at the west wall.

'We won… '

The situation had become so one-sided to the point that I was sure we won. Actually, saying *one-sided* was a bit awkward because there were barely any monsters alive.

'Very nice… '

Honestly, the aftermath of this war would be more problematic for me. I had a lot of things to take care of: I had to take care of Hee-Ra noona, finish my business with Xiaolin because she helped me, and explain things to Kim Hyun-Sung. I also had to expose Dialugia and our lovely baby. Naturally, the other guilds in Castle Rock wouldn't be able to claim ownership over her, but that was exactly why I had to think about how I should take care of them.

'I also need to… figure out my job.'

The postwar efforts would be problematic as well. I had to count the monsters' corpses, and I had to conduct a meeting regarding the damages, and the benefits the war had provided. People like me would be busier before and after the war than during the war.

"*Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!*"

“We survived! We survived!”

“Shit! We did it!!”

“*Waaaaaaaaaaah!*”

The soldiers started to shout louder and louder, but everyone reacted differently. Some cried at the loss of their comrades, the others cheered, but the majority were celebrating. It was naturally my job to speak up, as I had to declare the end of the war.

“We!”

Of course, everyone focused on me when I started talking, but that was when I felt my head spin.

‘Huh?’

I tried to speak, but I couldn’t.

‘Shit… ’

I was afraid that maybe someone had killed Dialugia, but that wasn’t the issue.

‘Did I lose too much blood?’

I didn’t think I lost too much blood, but I suddenly remembered how serious Dialugia’s injuries were earlier. It seemed like some of her injuries had been transferred over to me, and while they were being transferred, I was running around like a dog while bleeding, and I had even exhausted my mana. As such, it was only natural that my body reacted this way.

‘Ah… ’

I wanted to declare the end of the war before fainting, but my vision was becoming blurrier and darker. I started to stagger as I tried to keep myself together, but it was too much.

‘Wait… maybe this is better.’

Everyone was watching me, so collapsing from exhaustion might not be so bad.

“Oppaaaaaa!” Jung Ha-Yan cried out.

“Hyung-nim!!!” Park Deok-Gu screamed.

“Mr. Ki-Young!”

When I heard my party members yelling while looking at me, I was able to close my eyes happily.

‘This will make me look good.’

I even had the ridiculous thought that maybe the postwar issues would be resolved by the time I woke up. Many people died, and many soldiers were seriously injured as a result of Castle Rock’s defense war. The wound on the body of the commander-in-chief, who had fainted from exhaustion and became a role model to everyone, was only a bite from a small monster.

CHAPTER 181
THE END OF CASTLE DEFENSE (2)

When I opened my heavy eyelids, I saw the bright ceiling. I did feel kind of out of it, but I didn't think much time had passed. It went without saying that my body felt refreshed as if I had just woken up. The wound on my right arm had been treated, and my body felt soft as if I had just taken a shower.

'Someone must've washed my body… '

I was sure they used magic to clean me.

My vision was blurry, but it would get better over time, so it wasn't that much of an issue. Seeing that I was alone in this large room, I must be in a hospital room. It was *very* luxurious for a hospital room, but it was proof that they treated me well, so I felt good while looking around. Suddenly, the door slowly opened, and I expected it to be Jung Ha-Yan, but it was actually Lady Marilyn. I immediately heard her loud voice.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young!"

She ran over to me while crying and hugged me. Afterward, I felt a bit flustered when I suddenly fell backward. She must have been surprised by what she had done as well, as she was holding her hand up her chest. She was probably thinking about how her actions just now weren't very *ladylike.* I liked how she looked *really* embarrassed, but sadly, I wasn't interested in her at all.

'She is cute, though… '

Lady Marilyn wasn't very beneficial to me, and I also didn't have the energy to take care of her.

"Oh, Lady Marilyn."

I didn't forget to give her a polite smile, and when I spoke while smiling, she immediately answered.

“What’s today’s date?”

“It has been exactly three days since you fainted. I was worried that you wouldn’t wake up anymore…”

“Three days?” I asked once again.

“Yes, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

A little more time had passed than I had thought. I thought of many things for a moment, but I eventually felt better.

‘They’re probably almost done with the postwar issues… ’

Actually, it would take more than a day to clean up the monster corpses, so I was sure that they were still cleaning up, and that was when I realized why my party members weren’t here in this room. Dialugia must be doing fine, as there was nothing wrong with my body. I was curious about where she was, but there were other things I wanted answers for as well.

“I see…” I nodded

“Thank you very much, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” she suddenly said.

“For what?” I asked.

“The fact that you fought for Castle Rock to the point that you fainted… I was disappointed in myself for not being able to do anything. *Heuk*…”

“*Hahaha*. It’s fine. It’s the others that fought hard. I didn’t do anything,” I told her.

“That’s not true! Not only did you command the free city denizens, but you also stopped the monsters from the underground waterway… the citizens and free city denizens of Castle Rock witnessed how you fought hard on the battlefield! *Heuk*…”

“That’s… *ahem*. The Small Stone Guild and Mr. Song Jung-Wook are the real heroes, as they sacrificed themselves for Castle Rock. I just…”

“O-Of course, I remember their sacrifice, but… anyway… how are you feeling?” she asked, changing the subject.

“I’m fine. I don’t think I got hurt anywhere else,” I responded.

Lady Marilyn didn’t seem to care about how Song Jung-Wook got buried under a monster and died a horrible death, so I guess this could be considered a success.

Earlier, she mentioned monsters in the underground water, but that was a lie Jo Hye-Jin had made up to run away from Cha Hee-Ra. However, the Red Mercenary Guild threw a few monster corpses in there to make it seem real. We couldn’t let the others know that Cha Hee-Ra went berserk and ruined the defense war plan nor could we tell them the truth about the part of me fighting on the battlefield. I hadn’t exactly pulled my weight, but if I looked like I did, then I succeeded.

‘This is nice.’

If that’s what Lady Marilyn thought, then it was obvious what the others thought of me. There wasn’t a reason for the Blue Guild and me not to receive any benefits. When I spoke to Lady Marilyn again while smiling, she answered immediately.

“Where are the others…”

“Who exactly?”

“My party members and Miss Cha Hee-Ra. What about Dialugia? Have they finished cleaning everything up? Have they taken care of the other issues…” I responded.

“Oh! I’m very sorry, Mr Lee Ki-young. I should’ve explained everything that happened while you were out first…” she said in a low voice.

“It’s fine, Lady Marilyn. It’s nothing to apologize for. I was just curious whether the postwar issues had already been taken care of,” I told her.

“I-I didn’t know you cared so much about Castle Rock…” she whispered.

“*Hahaha*…”

“I’m sorry. I keep talking on talking like—”

“No, it’s really fine,” I said, interrupting her.

She looked a bit excited. It could be because she thought that risking my life for

Castle Rock meant I was also risking my life for her. It was nothing more than an assumption, but if I was right, then I had to clear up the misunderstanding in advance. When I smiled awkwardly, she started to talk nervously.

"If you're asking about what happened after you fainted… *Oh!* They started cleaning up the corpses right away, and they're still cleaning it up right now."

"I see…"

"There could still be monsters that survived, so the free city denizens started cleaning up first… so it's taking a bit of time. The Blue Guild party members are probably—"

"…Helping out," I said, finishing her sentence.

"Yes, they're working with the Red Mercenary Guild at the forefront by protecting the workers," she added.

"Is Miss Cha Hee-Ra with them as well?" I asked.

"She rushed back to Lindel. I'm not sure what happened, but she looked very busy, so I couldn't even thank her. She's a hero that fought for Castle Rock… I'm heartbroken by the fact that I couldn't treat her properly," she replied disappointingly.

'Did she run away?'

"Did you say she looked busy?" I asked.

"Yes. She said she had urgent business to take care of… *Oh,* Miss Cha Hee-Ra asked me to deliver this to you," she answered.

"Thank you. If you don't mind…"

"Feel free to read it right now, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

When I quietly looked down after deciphering the coded spell, I noticed Lady Marilyn peeking. I guess she must've wanted to read it as well, but obviously, I wasn't going to show it to her. I thought it would be an apology letter, but it wasn't that kind of letter.

[Don’t forget and don’t ignore me. Mr. Lee Ki-Young, the sub-guildmaster of the Blue Guild in Lindel. I trust that you’ll keep your promise and I’ll be expecting a nice invitation at the right time. - To Mr. Lee Ki-Young, the honorary bishop of the Holy Empire

- From Xiaolin, the Republic’s Five Tiger Generals, Commander Xiaolin]

‘Xiaolin?’

I guess she gave this letter to Cha Hee-Ra after their fight. I wanted to ignore her letter, but I had never imagined that she would reveal her identity.

‘Five Tiger Generals… ’

I didn’t know the details, but it seemed like the Republic didn’t have a problem with giving the free city denizens a government position, and based on her title, her rank was higher than I thought. Moreover, there were at least four more people as strong as her.

I didn’t know what kind of relationship the Holy Empire and the Republic would have in the future, but I did obtain some good information.

‘I think I can use this… ’

It would be risky on my side as well, but I was sure she would become useful in the future. Whether we were on the Republic’s good side or bad side, we had to face them at least once.

‘Based on the recent events, I don’t think things are going well with the Republic, though… ’

I couldn’t afford to go to the Republic right now because I couldn’t even take care of myself. The issues in the Holy Empire were enough to give me a headache.

The person I was worried about right now was Cha Hee-Ra. I was certain the reason why she left Castle Rock immediately without showing her face was because she was embarrassed. If she suddenly recalled this moment 20 years later, I was sure she would still feel embarrassed about it. I could understand why she felt that way since she left a mess after leaving the front line. She would probably appear in the future as if nothing had happened, but I was surprised that she had such a girly side. I

couldn't help but look forward to seeing her reaction when we met again.

"Also!" Lady Marilyn exclaimed excitedly.

"Yes?"

"Even though we haven't officially recognized you for your extraordinary service, I think we're going to give rewards to you, Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung, and to all the members of the Blue Guild," she added.

'Oh!'

"We didn't help because we were expecting a reward," I said.

I couldn't help but smile, and naturally, I treated her even friendlier without realizing it. When my coldness was suddenly replaced with kindness, Lady Marilyn quickly spoke up because she realized exactly what I wanted.

"But Castle Rock was able to overcome this crisis thanks to you and the Blue Guild. I even saw my father thinking deeply about it…"

"*Hahaha*…"

"If you think it's not enough, then I'll…"

"No, your thoughts are more than enough, Lady Marilyn. We *really* didn't do this to get rewarded. We only did what was right as a member of the Holy Empire," I explained, interrupting her.

"No, please let me pay you back…" Lady Marilyn said, begging.

"If that's your wish… there's nothing I can do, then…"

"Th-Thank you," she said, stuttering.

"I should be the one thanking you since you're rewarding us even though we only did what was right."

Marilyn was kind of a pushover, and I realized I would get a reward better than what I had imagined. When I slowly sat up, I noticed Lady Marilyn blushing. I wasn't

thinking about expressing my gratitude, as all I could think about was getting started on the work that had been piling up while I was asleep.

“Regarding the monster I captured…” I mentioned.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“Have you seen a woman with horns on her head?” I asked.

“*Oh…* that woman…” she mumbled.

“Did something happen?”

“I believe she’s in Castle Rock’s underground prison. We were actually thinking about what we should do with her… and…” she replied hesitantly.

“Please continue,” I encouraged her.

“That monster mentioned something outrageous like you two sharing a life…” she continued.

‘I wonder if that’s all she said… ’

What she had done was a reasonable decision. I didn’t think she mentioned that I was her spouse, but she had to save her life and the baby’s life. I liked the fact that she was quietly waiting for me, and I was certain her body hadn’t recovered just yet. I wasn’t sure if the baby was still with her, but I had to check up on her.

“I have to go and see her…”

“What?” Lady Marilyn questioned.

“What Dialugia said is true. I honestly don’t know the details on how it happened, but… all I know is that we are sharing a life right now,” I explained.

“*Ah!*” she gasped.

“Thank you for letting me know, Lady Marilyn. Let’s have dinner together with Count Castlerock.” I suggested.

“Sure, Mr. Lee Ki-Young!” she replied.

I immediately headed out.

‘I wonder how my baby is doing.’

Out of all the work surrounding me, Dialugia was the most important task.

CHAPTER 182
SMARTIE (1)

When I walked outside after putting my clothes on, the first thing I saw outside the window was a completely ruined city. Even though destroying the west area was originally part of the plan, seeing people restoring the area made me realize that the war had truly ended.

'The underground… '

It was only natural for me to think about the underground area. The original plan was to destroy the west area and rebuild it, but the plan didn't go exactly as I had expected. It wasn't too late to start now, but I realized that things in this world wouldn't always go according to my plans.

'While they're restoring the city… '

I could carry out my plan even though it was a bit late.

'I'm getting a headache.'

There were so many issues it was making my head hurt. I saw various scenery through the window while riding to the underground prison where Dialugia was locked up. Like Lady Marilyn had mentioned earlier, some were cleaning up the corpses, and others were cleaning the blood that had landed behind the castle walls or on the buildings. Aside from the fact that everyone was smiling, nothing really changed. It seemed like the adventurers leveled up since they all got a good amount of experience points, and the high-ranked players probably got the chance to change their jobs.

'It's the same for me too… '

I was sure my party members experienced the same thing. While Hwang Jung-Yeon, Jo Hye-Jin, and Sun Hee-Young might not have seen a noticeable difference since their growth rates were already high, I believe Jung Ha-Yan, Kim Ye-Ri, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Hyun-Sung not only got new jobs, but their stats must've also increased.

“I should talk to them…”

Since the goal of this expedition was to level up, I was certain everyone got an acceptable result. An epic-ranked job might have even opened up for Park Deok-Gu. I couldn’t help but smile at the thought that my party members were growing stronger.

One of the underground prison guards suddenly greeted me.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young? You’re awake.”

“Yes, I am. You’re Mr. Baran, right?” I asked.

“T-That’s right…”

He seemed surprised that a high-ranked person like me knew his name, but that wasn’t the case. All I did was use Mind’s Eye to read his information, and obviously, I wasn’t dumb enough to tell him that, as this was another type of touching story.

“May I ask what brings you here?” he asked.

“Of course. I have business in the underground prison,” I replied.

“Is it…?”

“Yes, it’s exactly what you’re thinking. I was actually thinking about what to do because the path there seems complicated, but I’m lucky I ran into you. If you don’t mind, could you lead me there?” I requested.

“*Oh…*”

“It’s fine if you’re busy,” I added.

“No, it’s fine! Of course, I’ll lead you there. Please follow me,” Baran hurriedly replied.

“*Hahaha*.”

“By the way, I think it’s really amazing how you came straight here as soon as you woke up. I’m sure you can rest a little more…”

“It’s because I had been sleeping for quite some time now. When I looked outside, I also saw everyone working hard.” I pointed out.

“It’s all thanks to you and the Blue Guild that we’re able to stay here,” he said.

“You flatter me. By the way, how have we been taking care of that monster?” I asked.

“I’m honestly not sure. Even though it’s my job to guard this place, I only know that the mages have been visiting and checking up on her, but other than that… At first, they restrained her so that she couldn’t move, but at some point, they removed the restraints,” he explained.

“I see…”

“I’m not allowed in that area, but I’m sure you can check it yourself. You’ll have to go in by yourself from here. Hey, open the gate,” Baran said to a different guard.

“Yes, sir,” the guard answered.

“Thank you,” I expressed my thanks.

Naturally, the guards guarding the path bowed toward me.

A spell must have been used to lock the door because when the guard activated a spell, I heard a click and the door open. I thought the prison wouldn’t be in the best condition, but it was cleaner than I thought. I did feel the presence of complex spells, but since they weren’t the type that would just randomly blow up, nothing untoward should happen as long as no one messed with them.

At that moment, I saw a familiar figure with horns on her head.

‘She has our baby, too.’

Dialugia was holding the baby close to her. I was worried that the mages separated her from the baby, but after considering the various possibilities, they must have thought this was the best decision. After seeing the magic circles drawn on her hands and feet, I assumed this was the countermeasure they had come up with. There was even a complex magic circle drawn on her neck.

‘I’m not sure whether that’s enough to control her, though… ’

Still, I was sure it would be fine since Dialugia hadn't fully recovered just yet.

"*Kyah!*"

"Yes! Your daddy is here!" I exclaimed.

The small dragon that let out a small cry while looking at me was pretty cute. I wasn't sure what was happening, but it felt like the baby was welcoming me. I guess being selected as Dialugia's spouse must have affected the baby. I was able to confirm it when I saw the baby wagging its tail.

However, unlike our child, my wife was wary of me. Seeing her clutching the squirming baby was a sight to see. The baby obviously wanted to come to me, so when I clapped to grab the baby's attention, Dialugia cowered a bit and spoke. The interesting thing was that there was relief mixed into her emotions, so I guess she was worried about me dying. I could understand her train of thought because if I died, she would follow suit.

"What do you mean, daddy?" Dialugia asked.

"I'm not sure if you're asking because you really don't know, but I'm a bit disappointed. *Pffft*. I think you're being a bit too cold-hearted when we're going to be a family. *Oh!* My baby! Did you miss your daddy? Peekaboo!" I jokingly responded, teasing her.

"*Kyah!*"

"Our little Smartie is making a fuss saying that they missed me." I pointed out.

"Smartie isn't its name…" she muttered.

"Did you name the baby without discussing it with me? I'm kind of sad," I told her.

"From the beginning… you weren't…"

"*Hahaha*. This family was created out of nowhere, but it's all thanks to your decision. I was a bit flustered as well, but suddenly becoming a father doesn't feel so bad. *Oh wow!* Good job, Smartie! Good job!" I complimented.

"Kyah! Kyah! Kyah!"

“Good job, baby!” I repeated.

“*Kyaaah!*”

“The reason why Dialuria likes you is that I chose you as my spouse, not because they actually like you!” she exclaimed.

“Is Dialuria the baby’s name? You should’ve discussed this with me first… but this is fine as well, as I’m the type that accepts my spouse’s opinion and is loyal to my family. By the way, I’m really relieved. It seems like there are other abilities when becoming a dragon’s spouse. I was worried the child wouldn’t like me,” I explained.

“*Grr…*”

“Come to daddy, Dialuria!” I said excitedly.

“*Kyaaaah!*”

Dialugia was still tightly holding onto our excited Smartie, but it didn’t take long for the overly excited child to escape from their mother’s grasp. Dialuria looked pretty cute when it jumped over and licked my face while wagging its tail. In addition to wagging its tail with its tongue out, it was also amusing to see how the baby was trying its best not to fall out of my arms. The look of betrayal on Dialugia’s face when she saw us playing was also such a funny sight to see.

“B-Baby!” she called out.

“*Oh ho!* My Smartie!”

“Come to Mommy!” she yelled.

“*Ooh,* my Smartie is so smart. Yes, you are!” I praised.

“*Kyaaaah!*”

“Dialuria! Can’t you hear Mommy telling you to come to her?!” she yelled once again.

“Daddy will take you on an airplane ride!”

“*Kyah! Kyah! Pant! Pant!*”

“B-Baby…”

“Isn’t our little Smartie having fun?”

“T-That’s not the baby’s name! It’s D-Dialuria…” Dialugia corrected with a mumble.

“Smartie!” I called out.

“*Kyah! Kyah! Pant!*”

‘This baby is really enjoying it.’

I began to question whether the baby had a dangerous habit, but after checking with Mind’s Eye, it seemed that its habit and nature hadn’t formed just yet. I didn’t even know the baby’s gender, and since I knew nothing about dragons, I had no idea what was happening.

It was right to assume that the baby was happy to see its dad, but it felt like I was playing with a puppy more than a baby. I already knew how to take care of these types of babies, so I was sure it was bored being alone with its mom in such a small space. In that case, it was natural for it to be overly excited when I took it on an airplane ride. The way little Smartie snorted and wagged its tail excitedly proved that it wanted to stay with me more than its mom.

“D-Dialuria…” Dialugia called out once again.

I guess our baby couldn’t ignore its mother’s pitiful state. Seeing it slowly pull my pants toward its mother made me think that our little Smartie wanted its mom and dad to get along.

“I think our little Smartie is telling us to get along, don’t you think? Smartie, you’re so cute…” I said.

“Its name is D-Dialuria, not Smartie,” Dialugia corrected once again.

“*Haha*. It’s just a nickname. Who cares what the name of our baby is when it’s so cute? Right, Smartie?” I asked.

“*Kyah! Pant! Kyaaah!*”

'The baby is pretty cute… '

I wasn't used to it at first, but the more I looked at it, the cuter it became in my eyes. Its large eyes and propeller-like tail were cute, but the best part was when it held onto me tightly as if it didn't want to leave me. For some reason, I felt like my heart was being healed.

When I continued playing with little Smartie, Dialugia looked at me like her whole world was collapsing, and naturally, it didn't take her long to speak up.

"Why did you come here?"

"Do I need to have a reason to come see my wife and child?" I retorted.

"I-I had no choice back then. I have no intention of acknowledging a human like you as Dialuria's father or my spouse," she struggled to explain.

"It doesn't matter whether you'll acknowledge me or not because I'm this child's father and your spouse. That was your decision. From what I can tell, this is similar to an oath, so it can't be undone… and more than that, our little Smartie really likes me, so you can't just say that you won't acknowledge me, right? Smartie, you like me as your dad, right?" I asked.

"*Kyah! Pant!*"

"B-Baby…"

"By the way, can this be undone? I'm asking because I don't know much about dragons yet," I told her.

"…"

"I guess it can't…"

"…"

"That's unfortunate. I'm a young man with a bright future, but I just can't ignore our cute Smartie," I added.

"You don't need to take care of us… I-It was my mistake, and I had to do it for my

baby. You were the one who threatened me by holding Dialuria hostage!"

"Watch what you say in front of our child!" I retorted.

"*Oh…* that's not what I meant, Dialuria…" Dialugia mumbled.

"*Tsk*. I'm sure I told you we're not the ones who kidnapped Smartie. Human laws even forbid the kidnapping of a monster's egg or child. A few of the criminals responsible for this have already been punished, and back then, I was only trying to protect our baby, not harm it," I explained.

"Lies…" she coldly said.

"It's true. Can't you see how much I like our little Smartie?" I asked.

"I don't trust humans," she added.

"So, what will you do?" I asked her.

"I will return to the forest after my body has recovered, and I'll return with Dialuria. I have no intention of getting involved with the humans anymore," she replied.

"Do you really think you'll be able to escape from this place?"

"I will escape this place…" she mumbled.

"*Ahh,* I see. I apologize in advance, then," I suddenly said.

"What… do you mean…"

"Did you know that I passed out for three days?"

"…"

"When a small monster bit me, it hurt so much, and the bleeding didn't stop. I almost died since I lost a lot of blood and even exhausted my mana. Isn't the human body *very* fragile? We faint even at the smallest wound…"

"*Oh…*"

“If I suddenly die after you escape to the forest with our baby, I’ll feel really bad for little Smartie. It’ll have to grow up without its parents… I *really* have to apologize in advance, *hahahaha*…” I explained while laughing.

Dialugia’s eyes quivered.

CHAPTER 183
SMARTIE (2)

"If I suddenly die after you escape to the forest with our baby, I'll feel really bad for little Smartie. It'll have to grow up without its parents… I *really* have to apologize in advance, *hahahaha*…" I explained while laughing.

Dialugia's eyes quivered. She looked flustered at first, but the urge to kill started filling her eyes, and it was obvious what she was thinking. She was gentle and more of a pushover, but I don't know what kind of unexpected action a mother would make to protect her child.

"I trust that you won't make the decision to do something to me and lock me up with only my life. I'll feel bad for little Smartie, who will grow up without a father, and I'm not dumb enough to come here without a safety device." I warned her.

"That's…"

"I don't know if you understand what authority is, but I'm a pretty important person among the humans. Many people care about me… and I receive a lot of love from the women around me, so it'll be difficult for you to carry out whatever you're thinking," I added.

"I didn't… have that kind thought…" she mumbled.

'I know you did… '

I thought it would be best to explain, so she could better understand. When I pulled Smartie over to my side, Dialugia looked surprised, but she didn't try to stop me because she saw her child wagging its tail with its tongue out.

When I drew a small circle on the ground, she looked at me quietly with a questioning look.

"This is Castle Rock, the city you're in right now."

"…"

"And this mid-sized circle is the Free City of Lindel, players live in this place… and the largest circle that includes all of these circles is the land of the humans. It's the Benigoa Holy Empire," I explained.

"What does that have to do with the current situation?" Dialugia asked.

"The size of the land you own isn't the only difference. The bigger the land, the larger the population, and the difference in the quantity and the quality of the troops that can fight is also there. Whatever the reason, you attacked Castle Rock first, and after losing the war, you ended up in this place," I replied.

"It would've been different if I fought with everything I had," she retorted.

"Humans are persistent and wicked. *Oh!* I'm not talking about myself, so there's no need to glare at me. The story will be different if we assume that you're able to kill everyone in this vast land, but in my opinion, I don't think you can. In other words, I'm at a fairly high position in this massive land, and the reason why you chose me as your spouse was that you discovered that." I pointed out.

"Humans are—"

"Let's assume that you kidnapped and locked me up somewhere. Some of the humans will look for you to save me. Your fierce attack will kill most of those humans, but humans are persistent, and it's all because they know your worth," I added.

"What kind of worth are you talking about?" Dialugia asked.

"The value of your body…" I replied.

She was surprised, and she blushed for some reason. I noticed her trying to move away, but unfortunately, that wasn't what I meant.

"To be honest, the fact that they discovered a legendary-ranked named monster is more important than the fact that I got kidnapped. Your sharp horns, beautiful and durable scales, long tail, and even your heart and jewel-like eyes are what I meant…" I continued.

“Y-You don’t need to compliment…”

“I wasn’t complimenting you. *Haha*. As I mentioned before, those are the things that are useful for humans, and *hm…* they could make a lot of money with those. Are you familiar with the concept of currency?” I asked.

“I don’t know much about it, but I think I know what you’re talking about,” she answered.

“Your body can make humans money. Leather can be made into armor, and horns can be made into weapons. The organs that make up your body will be used as experimental materials, and they have an enormous value. The only reason the humans haven’t been looking for you yet is that they haven’t discovered the dragon named Dialugia just yet,” I said.

“…”

“Humans are greedy. Since the legendary-ranked named monster, Dialugia, had appeared, the humans will hunt you down even after you escape from this place. The majority of the humans within this large circle will have heard about you by now, and I can guarantee that they’ll run at you like dogs once your shield is gone,” I added.

“…”

“It’ll probably be a long fight. There could be other humans who’ll take Smartie hostage just to kill you…”

“T-That’s what you did, and as I’ve said before, the name is Dialuria,” she responded, correcting me once again.

“Anyway, no matter what you choose to do, you’ll end up in a bad situation because you have already stepped deep into human society. It was your choice to come here, but you can’t leave here just because you want to,” I told her.

“How unreasonable…” Dialugia remarked.

“What?”

“It’s unreasonable. Humans are the ones who persecuted us first. We had nothing to

do with them. Humans stole my egg first, and they're the ones who separated me from my child. It's not like I wanted to fight!" she exclaimed.

I felt her quietly expressing her anger toward me, so I didn't need to say anything else.

"I just wanted to live quietly with my child. I didn't want to start a war with the humans…"

"I already told you that it wasn't up to you to decide. It may not be the best example, but don't you hunt other monsters to survive?" I asked.

When I slowly stroked our child, it stuck its tongue out as it came up to me. Dialugia didn't seem pleased with the sight because she took Smartie from my hand and continued talking, "It's completely different because humans do it out of greed."

"I don't think it's *that* different. We'll end up having a long conversation if we take a deep dive into it, so let's just end it here since I have already explained my point. Let's change the subject for a moment. Come here, Smartie," I called out.

"*Kyah*."

"Who's the reason you're alive right now?" I asked.

"That's—"

"I'm sure you know better than anyone else. The legendary-ranked Dialugia invaded Castle Rock, causing many casualties and injuries, as well as an enormous amount of damage. Of course, we'll receive some benefits thanks to the monsters' corpses, but basically, you're an enemy to mankind," I said, interrupting her.

"I'll say it again, but it's the humans who persecuted us first," she repeated.

"The humans don't care about that. To them, you're nothing but a monster. Strictly speaking, I'm the one who's taking care of you, not the other way around. Even though we're sharing a life, the only reason you're able to spend time with our little Smartie and spend somewhat of a comfortable time in this underground prison is because of our connection," I explained.

"…"

“If I were to tell you the worst-case scenario—if you hadn’t chosen me as your spouse, you and your lovely Dialuria would’ve died back then. Didn’t you connect our lives together because you realized that? Basically, I can’t let you die…” I said.

“*Grr*…”

“It won’t be a problem as long as you’re alive, right? I already know cutting off your horns or skinning won't kill you. If I continued to take care of Smartie, what could you do? If you think about it, I’m treating you with a lot of respect right now. Don’t you agree, Smartie?” I asked.

“*Kyah! Pant!*”

“I’m being considerate by letting you spend time with the child without suffering. *Hahaha*…” I laughed.

Dialugia probably realized I was right. She was still recovering, and she was also in a special situation where she had to protect her child.

“I know nothing about the dragon’s ecology, but I can make a few guesses. It’s about why a dragon needs a spouse…” I started.

“…”

“Why do you think Dialugia’s egg was stolen?” I asked.

“That’s—”

“That’s probably because dragons need nutrition. Dragons also use energy, so staying by the child’s side around the clock is a difficult thing to do. You probably had to prepare for when the egg hatched, get ready for winter, and build a nest, among other things…” I continued.

“That’s right,” she acknowledged.

“Taking care of a baby isn’t something you can do alone. It might be fine if you lived alone in the forest, but as long as there’s something you have to protect, it’ll change the situation. That’s why dragons look for a spouse despite being able to bear a child alone. What do you think of what I thought?” I asked her.

“You’re… right…” she softly said.

“It feels good when I get the answer right. Now, it’s your turn to guess the answer. As I mentioned earlier, you have already made a connection with a human, and whether you want to be involved with the humans or not, you’re in a position where you have no choice. If you have to start living in a city full of humans instead of the deep forest, who do you think will be the ideal spouse?” I asked.

“…”

“Who do you think will be able to keep our child safe, guarantee minimal freedom, provide education and a lot of good-quality food? Who do you think has the ability to provide a sturdy and safe nest for his lovely family? Who’s the ideal spouse you’ve been looking for?” I asked.

I guess Dialugia didn’t want to acknowledge it because she bit her lips. Since Smartie couldn’t understand what we were saying, they simply licked my hand. However, everything I just said was true. If she decided to live in the deep forest, then she wouldn’t need a spouse like me because I was nothing but a weak, selfish, and powerless human based on their standards. I wasn’t sure if there were other dragon races, but a suitable mate would be a dragon or a strong legendary-ranked monster since they would be able to keep the dragon’s nest safe. But the current situation was different—I was sure everything wouldn’t go as planned, but since she had already made a connection with a human being, and the fact that we had to live together meant that she had chosen her ideal mate.

“It’s… you…” Dialugia could only admit.

“That’s correct!” I exclaimed.

When I slowly approached her, I saw her flinch, but all I was trying to do was help her up. She didn’t know why I was doing this, but she quietly grabbed my hand.

“Let’s get out of here. I’m sure Smartie feels suffocated being here.” I suggested.

“What?”

“You’ve been through a lot, so you should go out and stretch your body. You also have to eat delicious food,” I explained.

“But…”

“It’s better if we thought slowly about how to explain our situation, but letting people know that I’m your spouse will make you feel uncomfortable, so we should think of something that sounds convincing. I honestly didn’t want to start a family in this state, so I hope you’ll understand, and there’s a woman that I’m actually seeing. There are just a lot of complicated issues. I probably won’t be a good husband, but I know I can be a good father, so you don’t have to worry about that. That’s advantageous for you too, right?” I asked her.

“Wait—”

“We have a lot of work to do. First, we need to get a document stating that you belong to me, and I also need to figure out what to do with the damage you have caused. The human world is complicated, after all. Let’s go outside, Smartie.”

“*Kyah! Kyah! Pant!*”

“Our cute Smartie has a lot of work to do as well,” I added.

I guess Dialugia was a bit flustered by my sudden change in attitude, as she was having a hard time keeping up, but she finally realized that she and her child were finally safe. She probably had a lot of thoughts in her head, as she once thought of me as a mean person, yet I was doing things a spouse was supposed to do for her.

Before we could leave the underground prison, she said, “I’d like to… ask a question.”

“Go ahead…”

“Humans are greedy…” she started.

“Yes, that’s right,” I acknowledged it.

“You’re greedy as well so you don’t have to lie. I can see it in your eyes,” she said.

“Yes, I’m a greedy human as well,” I told her, nodding.

“What is it that you want?” Dialugia asked.

“*Hahaha*. It’s nothing. I want you to worry about my safety and your own as well as

participate in my experiments. I'll prick you with a needle at most, and it won't be life-threatening. You just have to lie still," I replied.

"Experiments?"

"I guess I didn't explain that part. I'm an alchemist," I answered.

"I don't exactly know what an alchemist is…" She confessed.

"You'll find out soon enough," I said.

"Is that really all I have to do?" she asked once more.

"Excuse me?"

"If I just do that, will you provide a nest, food, and provide safety for my dear Dialuria?"

"As long as you follow the regulations, I can provide more than that, and I was already thinking about doing, as I want to become a great father for our child. I won't make you work, and I'll do my best to ensure that we're happy as a family. As I've said before, it's not just that…"

"…"

"Your body is valuable. If you lie still, everything will be taken care of. *Hahaha*," I explained with a chuckle.

I felt like a scumbag even though I said it myself, and that was when I saw Dialugia nodding her head as if she had made up her mind.

CHAPTER 184
THE EIGHT SEATS OF THE EMPIRE (1)

A lot had changed. Actually, it would be better to say that things were changing. The first thing I had to do was claim ownership over Dialugia, and it probably wouldn't be that difficult because Castle Rock was going to give me a reward, and the Blue Guild also played a big part in the defense. Some guilds and clans were disappointed, but a share of the monster corpses was enough to keep them quiet. It was true that we protected their hometown together, but it wasn't necessary to give them Dialugia's precious scale and leather. It may seem a bit selfish, but Dialugia was an achievement I had earned, so it would be strange for me to share her with the others.

The damage she had caused was the main problem. We probably had to provide enough compensation to the bereaved, but it wouldn't be enough. Not only did I personally compensate them, but Castle Rock also thanked them. I know it wasn't enough, but this was the best we could do. People questioned whether Dialugia was the cause of the monster wave, but the heresy inquisitors who came from the Vatican to investigate ruled out that suspicion.

'This is why having power is great.'

For this issue, I used my position as the honorary bishop to request help. I started with Father Judas, who had settled down in Castle Rock, and I even included the high-ranked religious figures at the Vatican. This was the result of the request I had sent to Sister Jessica, Sister Helena, Father Andurin of the Vatican, and to Father Basel, who loved me a lot.

Since the underground auction hall had to remain a secret, I had no choice but to hide the fact that the Small Stone Guild kidnapped Smartie, and the investigation ended with Smartie being influenced by the monster wave.

We were in a situation where we had no choice but to look for another *reason* behind the monster wave. The heresy inquisitors and the holy knights concluded that the monster wave was caused by an unknown dungeon located deep within the forest of Castle Rock, and the majority of the people didn't complain about the announcement, as they didn't want to be branded as heretics. It ended faster than I

thought. Of course, this was only possible because of my relationship with Dialugia.

'The Dragon's Chosen One.'

Officially, Dialugia was labeled as a pitiful dragon that invaded the city, as she had been under the control of the unidentified dungeon. They also pushed for a ridiculous story that involved selecting me so that she could save herself. This kind of story was something you would read in a third-rate novel, but I thought it wasn't that bad, as it was better than telling them that she had no choice but to select a spouse to protect her child.

There were warriors chosen by God, so saying that I was chosen by a dragon wasn't strange at all. Since a legendary-ranked named monster was in the Holy Empire, the emperor naturally actively supported us. The imperial knights concerned about national security expressed their worries about the danger the dragon would bring. Even so, it seemed like some of them wanted Dialugia to become a dragon that would protect the empire.

"Dragons are rare," I said out loud.

"What?" Dialugia asked.

"It's nothing…" I quickly said, dismissing it.

"*Um…*"

"Yes?"

"Well… thank you," she said.

"I'm not sure what you're thanking me about," I told her.

"For many things…" she mumbled.

"You don't have to worry. Things worked out thanks to you."

"What?" she asked, dumbfounded.

"Dragons are rare. You're older than the Benigoa Holy Empire's recorded history, so the humans think that your existence alone is amazing since you're 4,000 years old.

Almost all books about dragons are lost, and just like how you're mine, I'm sure the Holy Empire wants a dragon of their own as well," I explained.

"*Oh…*"

"Of course, my authority was helpful, but this amazing result was only possible because it involved many people's interests, so you don't have to be so grateful. Right, Smartie?" I asked.

"*Kyah! Pant!*"

"Come here, baby…" I said, urging.

"*Pant! Pant! Pant!*"

"Good job, Smartie! Good job!" I complimented.

"*Kyah! Kyah! Kyah!*"

Of course, this wasn't the only thing that had changed.

'This kid… It's so cute.'

I wasn't planning on becoming this close to the baby, but it was way cuter than I had expected. The way it jumped on the sofa to the sound of my clap was really cute, and it would blink its large eyes and sway its butt and tail gently whilst looking at me. Even its cries that I once found annoying sounded cute now. There were times when I felt annoyed whenever it licked my face, but Smartie was slowly starting to take root in my heart. Its outer appearance made me feel like I was raising a pet more than my child, but I was starting to understand why people back on Earth were so attached to their pets.

"Come here! Come here, Smartie," I called out.

"*Pant!*"

"Do you want a snack?" I asked.

"*Kyah! Kyah! Kyah! Pant! Kyah!*"

The way it wagged its tail and responded excitedly when I mentioned snacks and talking a stroll made me want to hug it tight.

“Y-You gave snacks earlier…” Dialugia mentioned.

“Children grow by eating. Isn’t that right, Smartie?”

“*Kyah!*”

“It can only have snacks twice a day. That’s the rule I set…” Dialugia interrupted.

“But look how excited Smartie looks, and isn’t it better to give more snacks since it can accumulate the nutrition?” I asked.

“It’s to the point that they have too much nutrition in their body, and I don’t consider the snacks here nutritious. It’s artificially made by humans, and they’ll be able to eat all they want in a few years, so it’s better to get them used to the proper serving while young,” she explained.

“Your mom is being harsh, right?” I asked.

“*Kyah!*”

“Dialuria… I-I’m doing this all for you…” she stuttered.

“They’ll only get two starting tomorrow. This will be your last one for today, okay?” I told Dialuria.

“*Kyah! Pant!*”

When I took out a large, round candy from my pocket, Dialuria’s eye widened as it looked at the candy. When I moved the candy back and forth, I noticed its eyes moving with the candy. Even though their body remained still, their tail was hitting the ground, and when I slowly placed the candy in its mouth, the way it jumped around the place was *really* cute.

“*Kyah! Pant! Pant!*”

“Do you like it?” I asked.

"*Pant! Pant! Kyah!*"

"Good job! Well done!"

When I clapped again, Dialuria jumped on the sofa, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that I had prepared the candy just to see it do that. When the baby expressed its joy while drooling, Dialugia smiled even though she didn't want to give it a third snack. Dialugia was still wary of me, but she seemed to have realized the fact that I *really* liked Smartie. I didn't have to try hard to pretend to be a good father, but I still showed her the kind of family in her dreams.

'It's so cute.'

I was even starting to think if I was spoiling it too much, so I could deduce what Dialugia was thinking. She had recently been watching Smartie and me more frequently with a smile.

"Smartie is standing!" I screamed.

"*Oh my,* Dialuria," Dialugia whispered in shock.

The baby that had been crawling on all fours started to stand on its two feet, and it kept on showing us new things every day.

'You've got to grow fast, so you can take care of your dad when he gets old, Smartie.'

Even though I had that thought, it was undeniably cute. Since the others really liked it as well, I knew I wasn't strange for having these feelings. However, not all the members found Smartie cute, and it was obvious which party member disliked Dialugia and Dialuria.

"O-Oppa…" Jung Ha-Yan called out as she entered the room.

"*Oh,* Ha-Yan. Good work today," I said.

"I-It was nothing. All I did was watch over the workers, and we're almost done cleaning up the corpses. By the way, are you feeling okay?" she asked.

"Of course. I'm totally fine now. I just fainted because I ran out of mana. I didn't have any serious injuries as well. How are the others?" I responded.

“I think everyone is going to gather in a few minutes. Mr. Hyun-Sung suggested that the party members should eat together…”

“Okay.”

“Are you available today?” she asked me once more.

“Of course…” I said, nodding.

“Th-That’s a relief…” she mumbled.

Jung Ha-Yan believed that Dialugia and Dialuria took me away from her. Even after I woke up, she couldn’t even cry about the injuries I had sustained, as I was busy trying to make Dialugia mine. It was only after things had calmed down that we were able to spend time like this, but just a few days ago, I was so busy that I couldn’t even sleep properly. Even so, I spent time with Smartie and Dialugia, so I could understand why Jung Ha-Yan thought that they took me away from her.

Dialugia was a monster, but she looked really beautiful in her human form, and despite telling Jung Ha-Yan that I would be careful, I was sure she had seen me holding Smartie a few times.

Even though she hadn’t mentioned it yet…

‘It was probably like seeing a happy family.’

She must have received a lot of damage when the heresy inquisitor announced that Dialugia and I were sharing a life. She must have been *really* dejected, as she locked herself up in her room. I didn’t know why, but she didn’t even open the door when I visited her. It seemed like she had been researching some kind of magic, but I didn’t see any results; no, it was more like I still hadn’t seen it yet. If Jung Ha-Yan *was* doing research, it must be about a spell to connect my life with hers as well. Theoretically, it might be impossible, but maybe…

‘It could be possible if Jung Ha-Yan was doing it.’

It could even be beneficial to me. She had recently grown a lot thanks to the monster wave, and she was also talented in magic. Since Jung Ha-Yan had to be taken care of just as much as Smartie, I had no choice but to focus on her a bit more. If I announced that I had become the dragon’s spouse, it would’ve been really difficult to

control Jung Ha-Yan. I knew it would be difficult because she was talking to me as if Smartie and Dialugia didn't exist.

While I was having other thoughts, Jung Ha-Yan quietly linked her arm with mine and pulled me close to her.

"Let's go right now!" she suddenly said.

I couldn't help but be conscious of Dialugia and Smartie's reaction. I wasn't bold enough to openly have an affair, but there wasn't anything I could do about this.

"I'll be back, Dialugia."

"…"

"Listen to your mom, Dialuria," I said.

"*Kyah! Kyah!*"

"L-Let's hurry, Oppa! Everyone is waiting…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

Both Jung Ha-Yan and Smartie were looking at me nervously, but unfortunately, the best choice for me was to ignore the baby this time.

"*Kyah! Kyah!*"

"Hurry, Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan raised her voice.

After closing the door, Jung Ha-Yan sighed as if she felt kind of relieved, and my instincts were telling me that she had caught onto something, which made me nervous. Naturally, I decided to change the subject, so when I spoke up, I immediately heard her happy voice.

"Is there a reason why Mr. Hyun-Sung wanted to gather us today?"

"Yes!"

"What?" I asked.

"I-I guess you… you didn't hear about it yet," she mumbled.

“Was there some kind of news?” I asked her.

“I don’t know the details, but… there are rumors that the Holy Empire is going to be selecting the Eight Seats of the Empire,” she replied.

“What?”

“And that they might select two people from the Blue Guild,” she continued.

‘What the hell?’

The sudden news agitated me.

CHAPTER 185
THE EIGHT SEATS OF THE EMPIRE (2)

'The Eight Seats?'

I somewhat understood why the Holy Empire was trying to create these seats. They didn't give high positions to the players, and becoming the honorary bishop of the Vatican was a rare moment that caused a big commotion. Aside from me, everyone else had nothing to do with the empire's official positions. The Guildmasters of large guilds and powerful players would usually receive the same treatment a general would receive, but the empire made sure not to let players intervene in politics. After all, it wouldn't be good for the empire if the players started to get involved.

'But now… '

They might've changed their minds when they saw how the players risked their lives to save Castle Rock, but I didn't think that was the case. There could be an external reason, but it wasn't beneficial for them to do all this just because we stopped one monster wave.

'Are they wary of the Republic?'

It wasn't a bad assumption because the Republic and the Holy Empire had long been in a strange rivalry. If the Holy Empire built a high building, then the Republic would do the same. If the Republic announced its research regarding new magic or dungeon, then the Holy Empire would make an announcement about a similar research not long after. There had always been a war between the two regarding public relations.

Because the Republic had the Five Tiger Generals, it was likely that the Holy Empire thought they *had* to make a move, too. I hadn't heard any official announcements from the Republic about the Five Tiger Generals, but since we had sent a few spies there, I was sure they would know whether they existed or not. Since the Republic had five, we should have eight! The emperor's faction and the pope's faction were fighting for power, so there had to be some kind of political factor I wasn't aware of. Because two people from the Blue Guild could receive a seat, all I could think of right

now was that maybe they made the seats so that I could keep the emperor in check, as I was a player and an honorary bishop.

'Are they not going to give the imperial denizens a seat?'

Once I talked to Kim Hyun-Sung, I should find out whether my assumptions were true or not. I did feel uncomfortable seeing him right now due to the misunderstanding we had, but I didn't think it mattered since everyone was going to be there.

"*Hehehe…*" Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

"Why are you laughing?" I asked.

"It's been a while since we got together like this, so it's nice," she replied.

"You're right." I acknowledged.

Jung Ha-Yan was smiling brightly regardless of my complicated thoughts.

'I'm sure she's not one of them.'

Actually, no one from the Blue Guild was competent enough to receive a seat. Our party was famous for growing rookies, and Jung Ha-Yan, Kim Ye-Ri, Sun Hee-Young, and Jo Hye-Jin weren't considered strong players.

'I'm sure it's our regressor.'

Even though he hadn't done anything significant yet, it would make sense that he was the reason for the Holy Empire's move, as he had filled in for Cha Hee-Ra during the monster wave. I wasn't able to see his performance because I was busy running around, but unlike me, who was busy spreading touching stories, he showed the imperial and free city denizens just how powerful he was.

'Maybe it's good that Hee-Ra noona didn't participate.'

If Cha Hee-Ra had been there, then his performance wouldn't have received the same acknowledgment as it did. Still, he had been at the center of Castle Rock's defense war.

Jung Ha-Yan smiled brightly amidst my complicated thoughts, and she was walking while holding onto me. It was a bit annoying, but walking with Jung Ha-Yan after so long wasn't that bad, as she was usually pretty cute.

When I opened the restaurant door, I saw the party members. I noticed Hwang Jung-Yeon talking to Park Deok-Gu, and next to them were Sun Hee-Young and Jo Hye-Jin quietly drinking their tea.

'They kind of look alike.'

I saw Kim Hyun-Sung taking care of little Kim Ye-Ri, and he was the first person who saw us. He didn't seem that upset when he quietly raised his hand. I thought he would ask a bunch of questions, but he must have decided to ask later.

'That's just like him… '

The uncomfortable feeling Kim Hyun-Sung had was bad for both of us, so I thought about creating a situation where it would be just the two of us. Park Deok-Gu must've seen Kim Hyun-Sung raise his hand because he turned around and exclaimed.

"Hyung-nim!"

"Yeah," I replied.

"I guess those chosen by dragons are different. I haven't seen you for so long," Park Deok-Gu complained.

"It's not a big deal. Stop overreacting," I chided.

"It's a big deal! It's only possible because you've lived with a grateful heart to god—"

"It's really not that big of a deal, Miss Sun Hee-Young," I said, cutting her off.

After hearing Sun Hee-Young compliment me, Jo Hye-Jin looked at me strangely, and it bothered me, but it made me think that she didn't want to get involved when she avoided my gaze. Seeing us awkwardly standing there, Hwang Jung-Yeon spoke, "You two are together today, too. How romantic…"

"Th-Thank you," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“You two should sit here.”

“Okay, Miss Jung-Yeon.”

It had been a while since I had seen the party members, but it wasn’t awkward. Kim Ye-Ri nodded lightly, and I nodded back. When I sat down and looked at the members, I noticed we had grown.

‘Maybe it’s normal… ’

Kim Ye-Ri, Kim Hyun-Sung, and Jung Ha-Yan had already changed their jobs, but I still hadn’t decided on mine, as I wanted to see the details before deciding. I thought everyone had unlocked new jobs, but Sun Hee-Young, Hwang Jung-Yeon, and Jo Hye-Jin only managed to increase their stats.

‘Their… growth rate is already high.’

Park Deok-Gu was the problem.

‘It’s really unfortunate. He’s… ’

I wasn’t sure if he was delaying in choosing his job, or he simply hadn't unlocked it yet, but he still had a rare-ranked job. His endurance and stamina had increased, but his growth limit didn’t increase all that much. His stats were great compared to other ordinary people, but Kim Hyun-Sung’s party was filled with members whose stats were abnormal, so Park Deok-Gu could be considered *ordinary* here.

‘I think I need to give him shock therapy or something one day… ’

I knew better than anyone that Park Deok-Gu was trying his best, but I guess he must have encountered a bottleneck, as he wasn’t making any progress. I wanted to solve his problem right now, but since I had more urgent matters to handle, I had no choice but to look at Kim Hyun-Sung.

Naturally, everyone looked at him because they were expecting our guild leader to start the conversation, and he started talking as if he had realized what we wanted. His voice could *definitely* draw people in.

“It has been a while since we gathered like this. I feel like we’ve been busier after the war ended. *Hahaha*…”

"…"

He must have wanted to say it like a joke, but it only confirmed that Kim Hyun-Sung didn't have a talent for jokes. He must have realized it because he cleared his voice and continued talking, "*Ahem*. A-Anyway, I'm glad everyone is safe. Also… thank you very much for trusting me."

"No need to thank us. We were just following your orders…"

"No, Miss Hye-Jin. That's not what I meant. This was Miss Ha-Yan, Mr. Deok-Gu, Ye-Ri, and Mr. Ki-Young's first large-scale battle. You've only been here for a year, and I know better than anyone that being at the front line is a difficult thing to do," he explained.

"*Oh…* I see. So this was their first large-scale battle…" Jo Hye-Jin commented.

"That's right."

'He's right.'

Running away while trembling in fear was the reaction people would usually have in such a large-scale battle. Park Deok-Gu scratched his head like he was embarrassed.

'So he was scared… '

I was also scared despite relying on our regressor and Hee-Ra noona. I didn't know what Kim Ye-Ri was thinking due to her expressionless face, and I was sure Jung Ha-Yan didn't understand what Kim Hyun-Sung was saying, as she hadn't been afraid.

"It's fine. We knew you wouldn't just leave us by ourselves, which is why we were able to stand on top of the wall, and you did save us a few times," I said.

"Ki-Young hyung-nim is right. I would've died a few times if it wasn't for you, bro. I can't say that I wasn't scared, but I can say that it was a good experience, so it should be us that should be thanking you," Park Deok-Gu added.

"Oppa is right…" Jung Ha-Yan chimed in.

"Yeah, Mr. Ki-Young is right," Kim Ye-Ri remarked.

Kim Hyun-Sung was an emotional person, so when the members shook their heads and thanked him altogether, he looked touched. When he bowed to express his gratitude, I confirmed once again that he truly had a great personality. I thought our regressor didn't have a cute side on him, but it was amusing to see him clear his throat because he was shy.

"Anyway, thank you, everyone. *Oh!* The reason why I called for everyone here was because of the eight seats the empire is going to announce. I'm not sure if you heard Mr. Ki-Young, but…"

"Ha-Yan told me on our way here. It's so unexpected…" I commented.

"Yes, it was a bit unexpected for me as well. I had a feeling that they would do something like that, but it seems too early…" Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Have you heard anything regarding the seats, bro?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I haven't, and it seems like even Mr. Ki-Young hasn't heard anything about this before. It's understandable for me not to hear about it, but for Mr. Ki-Young to not know about it is…" Kim Hyun-Sung stopped talking.

We could assume that the emperor had organized the seats. Of course, I couldn't say that the pope's faction wasn't going to make their move, but anyway, the emperor's faction had planned all this.

"I should first explain the eight seats of the empire. Basically, it seems like a system where they select eight people who they think are the strongest in the empire and give them a position and authority. I'll have to look into the details, but I'm sure it's no different from giving a person a noble title," he continued.

"Then does that mean the eight people must accept it no matter what? Wait, are you saying that there are two people in our guild the empire thinks are one of the strongest?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"They probably look at their stats, but I'm sure there are political reasons involved as well," he replied.

"It's an undeniable fact that you're strong, bro, but…" Park Deok-Gu commented.

I somewhat agreed with what Park Deok-Gu had said. Kim Hyun-Sung was strong,

but he wasn't strong enough to be part of the eight seats. When I was about to explain, I heard Jo Hye-Jin talking, "I'm sure they excluded the imperial denizens because if they included them, then eight would be a small number. There's Mr. Victor Hart of the imperial castle, and I heard the three templars from the Vatican are either a little bit stronger than Miss Cha Hee-Ra or on the same level as her. That's already four people…"

"You mean… stronger than that red-headed lady? I've heard of the gramp named Victor Hart, but… Wh-what's a templar?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"They're the three strongest knights the Vatican has. They're an armed group that only moves when a cardinal-ranked priest is in danger, and I heard their individual skills are legendary-ranked. I'm sure Miss Hee-Young knows more about them since she's a priest," Jo Hye-Jin explained.

"She's right. It's because cardinal-ranked priests play a major role in the Vatican. If Mr. Lee Ki-Young becomes a cardinal…" Sun Hee-Young said with a nod.

If that happened, then I was sure something good would happen. Since I was sure it wasn't going to happen anytime soon, I remained quiet, and Jo Hye-Jin continued talking, "The number fits if you exclude the imperial denizens. There's Miss Cha Hee-Ra of the Red Mercenary Guild, Park Yeon-Joo of the Black Swan Guild, Miss Kasugano Yuno of the Yozora Guild, and one person from Celia will take the dead Ito Sota's place… There's also a large guild in the Free City of Dawan where the Taiwanese live, and two people from there should be selected as well."

"*Oh…*"

"Of course, there are a lot of strong players within the empire, but they likely excluded the retired people and those whose skills are rusty. Our Blue Guild may even have a chance at getting a seat because of the few people who'll decline."

"Why would they decline?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"With the position and authority comes responsibility. Those who didn't want to be shackled by those will decline the offer. Since a monster wave happened at Castle Rock at the same time they were going to announce the eight seats, I'm sure they've been paying close attention to the news here. They selected—"

Jo Hye-Jin paused as if asking whether it was okay to say it, but Kim Hyun-Sung

decided to finish her sentence for her.

“Mr. Ki-Young and I received an offer to join the eight seats,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Hyung-nim did?!” Park Deok-Gu exclaimed.

Park Deok-Gu then stared at me.

CHAPTER 186
THE EIGHT SEATS OF THE EMPIRE (3)

“Mr. Ki-Young and I received an offer to join the eight seats,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Hyung-nim did?!” Park Deok-Gu exclaimed.

It was obvious what Park Deok-Gu was thinking. It was true that he liked me, but whether I was strong or not was a different story.

‘Hyung-nim did? He was offered one of the seats?’

This was probably what he was thinking. Since my physical stats weren't that great, I would suffer a serious injury if he punched me. I did have Juliena with me, but because she was still in hibernation, she wasn’t that efficient. I possessed a lot of alchemy magic that would help me strategically, but it wasn’t anything compared to Jung Ha-Yan’s magic. Basically, my power was useless. I was sure Park Deok-Gu didn’t think of me that way, but he seemed like he was questioning how I was offered one of the seats.

“Hyung-nim, too…” Park Deok-Gu mumbled.

“For Mr. Ki-Young’s case…”

“I’m sure Dialugia’s existence played a big part…” I said, finishing Kim Hyun-Sung’s sentence.

“From the empire’s point of view, there’s no reason for them to exclude the person chosen by a dragon. I’m sure they want to tie down the first dragon that showed itself to the world because it wanted to interact with humans… Simply put, the power that Dialugia has makes you more than qualified to have one of the seats, so it would be strange if you weren’t offered a seat,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“*Oh…*”

“Basically, you’ll be seen as a tamer who had summoned a monster that can’t be

tamed, or a summoner who had summoned a unique being. Also…" Jo Hye-Jin said.

"Yes?"

"This is a bit off-topic, but as an alchemist, your position is unrivaled. As of right now, you're the only person able to create epic-ranked and above potions. Of course, the process itself is irrelevant to battle, so it's not very impactful," she added.

"I-I see…" Park Deok-Gu stuttered.

"I'm not a tamer or a summoner who can control Dialugia…" I commented.

"Th-That's better than nothing, hyung-nim! I-Isn't it still amazing?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

I guess it could be considered amazing, and just like Jo Hye-Jin had said, Dialugia could be seen as a unique being. Right now, her body wasn't in the best condition, but if I assumed that she could use her breath, then I was sure it would be stronger than any unique magic.

She had free will, so who cared about what other people thought? The most important thing was that she chose me, and I could borrow her powers. Park Deok-Gu was surprised and kept talking about different things, but he seemed kind of sad.

'Sigh… this guy… '

It was *very* obvious why he was sad. He was probably thinking that even though we entered the continent together, the gap between us was increasing so fast he couldn't keep up. It was more like he was feeling ashamed of himself rather than jealous. He just couldn't recognize that he was growing fast, as the people around him were abnormal. Naturally, I said something because I felt like I had to comfort him.

"I'll just be politically involved and get a title. It's possible that Castle Rock is forcefully trying to take a seat for me, as they're conscious of the Vatican. Maybe the Vatican is trying to force me into one of those seats, but whatever the reason, nothing will change, Deok-Gu," I assured him.

"But it's still amazing that you got chosen, and you are the honorary bishop as well… You're also the smartest person out of all the smart people on this continent…" he said, complimenting me.

“I’m not smart. I just move more cautiously than others,” I corrected him.

“It’s the same thing. You also did an amazing job leading the recent defense war, so I’m sure they think highly of that. The same goes for the guild master… Anyway, I’m happy that we have a lot to celebrate… Everyone is doing great!” he exclaimed.

“Actually, I haven’t decided whether I’ll accept it or not…” Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

“The decision is up to the guild master and the sub guild master.”

When Jo Hye-Jin said that, I couldn’t help but stare at Kim Hyun-Sung. Jung Ha-Yan simply leaned and blinked as if she wasn’t interested, but the other party members looked somewhat serious, as this would determine our path in the future.

‘He’ll probably… ’

He would probably accept it because it didn’t seem like a bad offer.

“For me, I think it’s a good idea to accept it. There are responsibilities included with the authority and position, but personally and as a guild, there’s no reason to decline. It’ll also help with the Blue Guild’s growth. Mr. Ki-Young, I know it’s up to you whether you’ll accept the offer or not, but I suggest you accept the offer.” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

I agreed with him.

“I don’t think there’s a reason for me to decline either. Being a representative of the empire will benefit our work,” I said in agreement.

“I knew you were going to say that,” Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

“*Haha*…”

“That’s why… Mr. Ki-Young and I will visit the castle,” he added.

“*Huh?!*”

Even though she had been quiet all this time, Jung Ha-Yan reacted strongly to what Kim Hyun-Sung said. She did calm down after hearing what he had to say, but he must’ve been quite surprised when she suddenly cried out.

“Miss Ha-Yan will be coming as well, so there’s no need to worry,” he said.

“*Oh…* okay…” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

“Miss Hye-Jin, please wrap things up here, and Miss Jung-Yeon, after you return to the guild with the remaining members, please make preparations by following the guild advisor, Lee Sang-Hee’s lead,” he ordered.

“*Ah…* come to think of it, it’s about that time.”

“What kind of preparations…” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“The next group is coming,” he replied.

“*Oh!*”

I had completely forgotten about it. It usually opened yearly, so that would be right around this time. The tutorial dungeon must be in progress right now, but its completion could take anywhere from a few days to months, depending on the players’ speed.

‘Time flies really fast.’

“The Red Mercenary Group will be taking care of this year’s tutorial dungeon and even if it isn’t our turn, we really need to recruit new members,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“How many people are you thinking about recruiting?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“I haven’t really decided on the number of members yet, but if they’re like-minded and can vibe well with the Blue Guild, then I’m probably going to accept them,” he answered.

“Okay…”

“After discussing with Miss Cha Hee-Ra, I’m thinking about taking priority over the recruitment, so I’ll be busy doing that. Obviously, you shouldn’t miss out on training or hunting just because of it. *Ahem*… I’ll stop the boring talk now. Let’s eat and catch up,” he suggested.

Once Kim Hyun-Sung was done talking, the atmosphere became a bit noisy. I expected this to happen because it had been a while since everyone gathered in a comfortable setting, and it was fun spending time with the people I had known for a long time.

I did feel bad for Smartie since they were probably waiting for me in the room, but after talking to the members, I had no idea so much time had passed since we had done this. Seeing Park Deok-Gu's serious expression did bother me, but he was trying to look happy.

"Have another drink, Oppa," Jung Ha-Yan offered.

"No, I think this is enough for me," I declined.

"B-But it's a special day…" she stuttered.

"Then, I'll have one more," I said.

"Okay!" she replied excitedly.

I didn't know what Jung Ha-Yan was up to, but she kept offering me alcohol. It was fine to be moderately drunk, but I had a feeling something bad was going to happen if I drank more, so I declined. Naturally, it was hard to shake off the tenacious and desperate Jung Ha-Yan.

I didn't know what Park Deok-Gu was thinking, but I guess he wasn't in the mood to drink. I was sure he had something on his mind, as even when I offered him a drink, he simply smiled and declined. I was waiting for the right time to say something to him, but moments later, he ended up leaving, and it wasn't just him. Both Kim Ye-Ri and Sun Hee-Young left a while ago, as one was underage, and the other didn't really enjoy drinking. I could understand, as it was getting late, but…

"I'll be heading out as well, Mr. Ki-Young."

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

"Okay! Are you drunk?" Jung Ha-Yan asked me after bidding Kim Hyun-Sung goodbye.

"No, I'm still sober," I replied.

"*Oh…*"

'Why are you disappointed?'

"It's late, so we should head back and rest," I suggested.

"Okay…" she mumbled.

"Maybe, you want to go on a short stroll?" I asked her.

"R-Really?" she stuttered.

"Of course…"

I had been neglecting her recently, so I thought a small event like this wouldn't hurt. I was sure she had been *really* stressed, so it was important to do something like this to relieve her, as there was nothing scarier than blowing up after keeping stress bottled up.

It was a bit chilly, but it was still warm enough for a stroll. The moon hung brightly in the sky, so I guess this could be considered romantic.

Jung Ha-Yan's hand was shaking as I held her hand. I guess she was happy even though we were only walking around the garden inside the castle. All of a sudden, I heard a noise in the quiet night.

"Did you hear that?" I asked.

"I did." Jung Ha-Yan nodded.

Of course, I was curious. Jung Ha-Yan led me to the dark and gloomy place where the sound originated, and when we arrived, we saw Park Deok-Gu and Kim Ye-Ri.

'What are they doing… '

I was confused for a moment, but I understood what they were doing when I saw them pointing their weapons at each other. Before I could even blink, Kim Ye-Ri ran toward Park Deok-Gu with her dagger aimed at his neck. Park Deok-Gu quickly raised his shield, but that was all he did in response to the kid's attack.

"*Hah!*"

He released a short and unique shout, but his attack was useless. The way the kid barely dodged his attack like she was teasing him was a great sight.

'Is she a cat or what?'

It felt like she could stay in the air longer than others. Park Deok-Gu tried to slam the kid halfway up in the air down, but she dodged by twisting her body, and to make things worse, I didn't understand how she landed on the shield so lightly. Both Park Deok-Gu and I were shocked, but I was sure he was more shocked than I was because something incomprehensible had happened before his eyes. Kim Ye-Ri's foot flew toward the agape Park Deok-Gu's face, and the kick struck his forehead, making him fall to the ground. When she immediately pointed her daggers at his neck, the winner was decided, and she whispered to him.

"You're weak."

"It's not over yet," Park Deok-Gu said.

"It's over… If I don't go to sleep during my bedtime… I'll get in trouble. And we've been here for a long time now," she told him.

"*Ugh*… one more time," he requested.

"No, it's not fun." Kim Ye-Ri declined.

"One last time!" he shouted.

"Mr. Deok-Gu. If we fought for real, you would've died a few times already, so let's stop here. Let's do it tomorrow again. It's not fun, but it's good to train," she suggested.

Kim Ye-Ri didn't have any ill-will toward him. She simply wasn't good at communicating and expressing her emotions, but I guess her words got to him, as Park Deok-Gu didn't look so good.

"Then, *ahem*… I'll watch you during practice tomorrow…" Park Deok-Gu compromised.

“Wrong. I’m the one watching you during practice,” Kim Ye-Ri corrected him.

“It’s the same thing. Anyway, go inside, Ye-Ri,” he told her.

“Okay. Good night, mister,” she said, nodding.

“Also… it’s Oppa, not mister,” he corrected.

“You don’t have the face of an oppa. You look like a middle-aged man.” She pointed out.

“…”

Seeing Kim Ye-Ri being blunt until the very end made me question whether she had done it intentionally or not. Park Deok-Gu spaced out as Kim Ye-Ri quietly left the scene. I had never talked to her for as long as Park Deok-Gu had, so I guess they must have secretly met a few times like this.

‘Tsk… ’

Even after Kim Ye-Ri left, Park Deok-Gu stayed and sat down with his back leaned against the wall. Even Jung Ha-Yan stopped pulling my arm and directed a serious look at Park Deok-Gu. Park Deok-Gu looked like a mess. He was covered in sweat, and he must have rolled around in the dirt a few times because he looked dirty. If he started training after leaving the drinking party earlier, I could understand why he looked like that after receiving a beating from Kim Ye-Ri for a few hours. When the guy with the large frame dropped his head between his knees, I pitied him, as I had an idea of what he was thinking. I did think about saying something to him, but I was sure he didn’t want to show *that* side of him to anyone else. He stood up and started swinging his sword once more.

“*Hah*…”

Park Deok-Gu must be tired, as his body was trembling.

“*Hah*…”

Despite that, he continued to swing his sword. Honestly, I wanted to tell him that what he was doing was useless. Swinging his sword a few times like that wouldn’t close the gap, and that kind of training didn’t seem very effective. If people could get

stronger just by swinging their swords a few times, then there would be many strong people on this continent.

Park Deok-Gu was facing the obstacle called talent, not effort. If he somehow filled that up, the gap would quickly open once again, and even if he somehow managed to catch up, the gap would still continue to widen.

I know it wasn't my place to say this, but it was impossible for people like Park Deok-Gu to catch up to Kim Hyun-Sung or Kim Ye-Ri. The system had even said it. No matter your efforts, talented people would eventually climb up, and the most talented player among the talented would receive the trophy. To be frank, Park Deok-Gu's chance of catching up to those guys was close to zero, but I didn't want to hell him that what he was doing was dumb, as I kept hearing him mumbling.

"I can do better… I can do better…"

CHAPTER 187
A FOOL (1)

"Let's go back, Ha-Yan," I said.

"Okay…" Jung Ha-Yan replied.

I wanted to comfort him, but I didn't think this was the right time to do that, as no matter what I would say, I was sure he wouldn't process it. As someone who talked to Park Deok-Gu pretty often, Jung Ha-Yan looked a bit sad. The other party members were important, but Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu were labeled the *most important,* so I could understand why she was reacting this way. We had been together since the tutorial dungeon, and we took care of her when became an outcast. Park Deok-Gu even gave a beating to the molester whose name I couldn't remember anymore, so excluding me, I was sure she was *very* close with Park Deok-Gu.

'He even played cupid… '

I was afraid that he might see us, but even when we started walking away quietly, he continued to swing his sword. It did bother me that he kept mumbling.

'I can do better… '

I was certain he kept repeating the words I told him when we first met. Honestly, I only said that to urge the scared Park Deok-Gu, but I guess those words must have been supporting him all this while, and I couldn't help but feel a bit embarrassed. Of course, I trusted him, but the reality that the status window had displayed was harsh.

'Whoever said fortune favors the prepared is full of shit.'

A few people would *truly* earn great things by putting in the effort, but effort alone wouldn't change the situation. If his goal was to become a genius, then his efforts would easily betray him. When I glanced back, I saw Park Deok-Gu continuously swinging his sword, and despite trying to ignore it, the scene kept playing in my

head. I didn't want his efforts to betray him, but if his stats *really* reached their limits, and if others decided that he could no longer keep up with Kim Hyun-Sung's party, I thought about which side I should take.

'He's going to die.'

It wasn't about abandoning him or not. I would always be in the rear with many safety devices during expeditions, but Park Deok-Gu was a vanguard, and his mistake could wipe out the entire party.

Honestly, the annihilation of the party wasn't the issue. If Park Deok-Gu fought an opponent he couldn't handle, he would die. It was the same with Cha Hee-Ra. If she had become crazy to the point that she wasn't able to differentiate between her enemies and allies, Park Deok-Gu would have failed to block her first attack, and he would have died on the spot. The path that Kim Hyun-Sung's party was going to take onward would be a difficult one, so it might be better for him to stay put from now on.

'I'm getting a headache. Shit… I still need to change my job… '

My hands were already full with thinking about my fourth job, but now, there was an additional problem I had to think about.

* * *

"I'll see you later," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Okay. I'll make sure to wrap things up here, master," Jo Hye-Jin told him.

"You can take your time," he replied.

"I'll also take care of the business in Lindel, so don't worry, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Enjoy your time, Mr. Ki-Young and Miss Ha-Yan," Hwang Jung-Yeon assured us.

"We'll see you in Lindel, Miss Jung-Yeon."

"I hope you have a great time, Mr. Ki-Young."

"We won't take long. I'll leave the slums up to you, Miss Hee-Young," I told her.

“Okay…” Sun Hee-Young replied.

Before leaving, we took a moment to say goodbye, but I couldn’t help but feel like someone was glaring at me from the corner. Jo Hye-Jin was left in charge of rebuilding Castle Rock’s black market, and Kim Ye-Ri was agitated about the prospect of being away from Kim Hyun-Sung. However, the glare wasn’t coming from either of the two. Dialugia was glaring at me while holding Smartie. She usually had a straight face, but now, she looked down and dissatisfied. She must have disliked the fact that I had to go to the city. I told her it wasn’t going to take long, but despite that, she was still angry. On that fateful night when I saw Park Deok-Gu secretly training, she slightly raised her voice at me when I returned to their room, and she got mad because I had neglected my family to wander outside.

‘What’s going on… ’

Something felt off, but I had never thought that she would try to tie me down this soon. From her point of view, she was doing it for Smartie, so it was reasonable. Smartie must’ve realized we would be apart for a bit, as it kept screeching and struggling. Naturally, I thought it would be good to say something to them, and since Jung Ha-Yan was talking to the other party members, I could have a short conversation with her.

“I’m heading out, Dialugia.”

“…”

I awkwardly laughed before speaking once again, “*Ha*… *hahaha*… I’ll be back, Dialugia.”

“…”

“It won’t take long,” I assured her.

“I don’t understand why you’re reporting to me. Aren’t you the type that must do everything you want to be satisfied?” Dialugia asked.

“If I had a choice, I would stay with Smartie, but I can’t do that in the current situation,” I told her.

“And what kind of situation is that?” she asked.

“I explained it to you last time… I hope you understand that I’m doing all of this to create a safe nest for us…” I replied.

“I understand what you’re thinking, and since we’re on that topic, let’s discuss more about it. A safe nest. A safe nest. A safe nest. That’s great, but the safest nest is when Dialuria is by your side. As I’ve explained before, this is the most important time for Dialuria’s growth, and if you take that into consideration, I really can’t understand why you’re doing this. Even Dialuria is anxious,” she explained.

“*Kyah! Kyah! Kyah! Kyaaah!*”

‘Smartie… stop overreacting.’

“It’s so obvious how humans think. When you arrive in the city of humans, you’ll drink the bad drink you had that night and lose your mind. I believe you know better than anyone just how much of a bad influence that is to our Dialuria and even to your health. I don’t care if you hold hands or kiss other female beings, but don’t you think you should at least be loyal to Dialuria?” Dialugia asked me once more.

‘Shit… she’s scary… ’

“I know very well that humans are liars. Good contractor, my ass… You boasted that you wouldn’t make me suffer, but you easily neglected your nest. You’re lacking in self-awareness, to begin with,” she continued.

“Human society is complicated. Communication is important, and that’s why I can’t miss out on the drinking parties,” I explained.

“That’s what you always say. It’s complicated. Human society is dangerous. Then could you explain why you’re leaving Dialuria all by itself in this complicated and dangerous society?” she asked.

“It’s… It’s all part of my job,” I could only say.

“Your *job* is to protect and love Dialuria, not drink and lose your mind,” she argued.

“…”

“…”

“Come here, Smartie,” I called.

I didn’t have an answer to her remark, so I changed the subject. I knew very well she wasn’t going to accept anything I would say. Playing with Smartie before leaving was the best thing I could do right now.

“*Kyah! Pant!*”

“Good job, Smartie. That’s right! Just wait for two days, and I’ll be back,” I said.

“*Kyaaaaaaah!*”

“Hey! No yelling, Smartie!” I yelled.

“*Kyaaaaah*…”

“I’ll be right back, so can you wait a little bit?” I asked.

“*Pant… pant, pant!*”

“Listen to your mom and wait patiently for me…”

“*Pant! Pant!*”

“Our Smartie matured a lot,” I complimented.

“*Kyah!*”

“That’s right! Good job!” I complimented once more.

“*Kyah! Kyah! Kyah!*”

I guess seeing the baby dragon jumping around helped Dialugia calm down a little. How could she not feel calm when her precious baby acted so cutely like that? She was still mad, but there was nothing more effective than Smartie when calming her down. All of a sudden, I could feel the others looking at me strangely. Excluding Jung Ha-Yan, the majority of the members looked at us as if they were touched, and that was when I realized the sight Dialugia, and I were displaying was unusual. Dialugia didn’t seem to care, but I couldn’t help but be bothered because I was worried about Jung Ha-Yan. The majority of the female members had fallen for Smartie’s cuteness,

but Kim Ye-Ri especially had sparkles in her eyes when she saw Smartie jumping around. When Dialugia saw the look on Kim Ye-Ri's face, she quickly picked Smartie up.

"I-It's cute," Kim Ye-Ri remarked.

"Please come back as soon as possible," Dialugia said to me.

"I will, and after you arrive in Lindel, the guild will start building the nest, so if there's anything you need, find the human named Team Leader Kim Mi-Young and tell her what you need," I instructed her.

"A nest?" she asked.

"That's right. I honestly don't know how a dragon's nest is made… but I told them to discuss it with you and to start working immediately," I replied.

"I see…" she mumbled.

"It'll be customized, so you can build it however you want," I added.

Dialugia still looked unsatisfied, but after hearing that a new nest was going to be officially built, she looked like she was feeling better. Thanks to my gift and Smartie's cuteness, I overcame the hurdle of Dialugia's anger. However, I had another hurdle to overcome. Fortunately, I had a lot of opportunities to make Jung Ha-Yan feel better, as we were heading to the city together. It seemed that Jung Ha-Yan knew that as well, as she seemed a bit happy. She ran up to me and hugged me, but I was more concerned with Park Deok-Gu than her.

When I glanced at him, I noticed his big, calm face approaching me.

"Have a safe trip, hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu said, almost exclaiming.

"Thanks. Take care of Dialugia and Dialuria for me while I'm gone," I requested.

"*Oh…*"

"Since we're sharing a life. You understand, right?" I asked.

"I think I know what you're talking about," he replied.

“Deok-Gu,” I called out.

“Yes?”

“I trust you, and if I can do it…”

“I know, I know. I can do even better. That’s what you were trying to say, right? You’re going to make my ears bleed. You don’t have to worry about me, so enjoy your trip,” he assured.

“Have fun with Miss Jung-Yeon,” I added.

“*Ahem*. I’m not in that kind of relationship with Jung-Yeon noonim. Hyung-nim, you should be the one worried about Ha-Yan noonim,” he retorted.

“Hang in there! Deok-Gu Oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan exclaimed.

“*Hehehe*. I’m Park Deok-Gu, a man overflowing with power every day,” he boasted.

After saying that, he smiled and patted Jung Ha-Yan’s head. I couldn’t help but think that he was pretty skilled at pretending like nothing was wrong. When I was still unfamiliar with him, there were signs I had overlooked, but now, I was noticing those signs, and I couldn’t help but be bothered by them. I was sure he was swinging his sword all day yesterday. He probably thought I wouldn’t notice it, but I could smell his sweat just by standing close to him. He did change into clean clothes, but I guess he didn’t shower. Of course, the smell didn’t really bother me.

“Mr. Ki-Young, we should…”

“*Oh,* okay, Mr. Hyung-Sung.”

Naturally, we got on our griffons, and Jung Ha-Yan stuck to my back like gum. I waved at the people waving us goodbye and the still jumping around Smartie. When Park Deok-Gu saw Kim Hyun-Sung and me fly into the sky, I felt like I saw his fists tremble. Before I disappeared into the clouds, I saw him turn his back before running away.

‘Fool.’

He was the stupidest person I had ever met.

CHAPTER 188
A FOOL (2)

During my first visit, the city looked grand, but my second visit didn't give me as much excitement. The city was still sparkling, and the scenery was wonderful while on the griffon. Honestly, I couldn't really pay attention to the city because I kept on recalling the scene where that foolish Park Deok-Gu ran away.

'That fool is just making people upset… '

However, I was able to stop worrying about him. His actions did annoy me, but I understood better than anyone that since I arrived in the city, my business here was the priority. Obviously, the very first thing I had to do upon arriving at the castle was to manage the connections I had neglected all this time. It was only my second time around, but I was already used to landing the griffon, and as soon as I landed, I heard a familiar voice calling out to me. I instantly knew who it was, as there was no one else who liked me the most at the castle.

"Father Basel!" I called out.

"Brother Lee Ki-Young! You've lost weight since the last time I saw you. I heard what happened at Castle Rock," he responded.

"*Hahaha*. It's all thanks to the Goddess of Benigoa. Sister Jayna! Sister Helena! It has been a while," I greeted.

"Brother Lee Ki-Young, it has been a while…"

"*Oh,* let's start with the introductions. This is Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung, the guild master of the Blue Guild, and he's one of the players who received a recommendation for the eight seats," I introduced.

"*Ahhhh*. I've heard a lot about you, Brother Kim Hyun-Sung," Father Basel said, nodding.

"I've heard a lot about you as well, Father Basel. My name is Kim Hyun-Sung. I look

forward to working with you," he greeted.

Father Basel, Sister Jayna, and Sister Helena greeted Kim Hyun-Sung and me at the griffon landing field, and we had a short conversation over tea.

I didn't think Cha Hee-Ra was already here. Since the official announcement of the eight seats was going to take place later, it didn't matter if she wasn't here right now. But, still, she really didn't show her face anywhere. It was really like Cha Hee-Ra to do such a thing.

'Maybe she's still embarrassed… '

When that thought popped into my head, I thought that maybe she had long arrived at the royal castle, but she ran away after being ordained. After all, I heard that a few people had arrived and had already left. The Red Mercenary Guild was busy preparing for the arrival of the new recruits, so I was sure they didn't have much free time.

While talking with the members of the Vatican, what I found interesting was that it was Father Basel who supported me for the eight seats. I found it intriguing, as I thought the Vatican wouldn't like me to take one of the eight seats. They were probably certain that I was closer to the Vatican than the royal castle, and if that was what Father Basel thought, it was understandable for him to forcefully give me one of the seats. The honorary bishop of the Vatican being selected as one of the eight strongest players in the empire would be a good marketing tool, after all.

Sister Jayna, Sister Helena, and I had a short but exciting prayer service, and after that, I met with the nobles I hadn't seen in a long time. The only thing Victor Hart and I did was exchange greetings, but I did end up chatting with Lady Caitlyn and Lady Marilyn, who had arrived at the castle before me. I thought Lady Marilyn was up to something since she didn't come out to say goodbye to me at Castle Rock, but I had never imagined that she had prepared all this. Lady Marilyn led the majority of the conversations, and she mostly talked about my heroic deeds during Castle Rock's defense war to the other noblewomen. She even included stories about the Blue Guild, which made me think of that fool again, and it annoyed me.

It was obvious, but I was able to realize just how interested the public was in Dialugia.

'It's a good thing I didn't bring her with me.'

It wouldn't matter if they promoted dragons during the official announcement. Dialugia was pretty busy right now, and if I brought Smartie here with me, then she would most likely get involved in some strange incident.

Like me, Kim Hyun-Sung was busy. Since this was his first time at the royal castle, he was busy meeting the people with connections to Jung Ha-Yan and me. However, unlike me, who spent time with the nobles and the members of the Vatican peacefully, he would either drink with the higher-ups of the castle or spar with them.

The people who didn't want the Vatican supporting me after being chosen by a dragon questioned Kim Hyun-Sung's capabilities, but I guess his conversation about the sword with Victor Hart and the members of the castle really helped increase his reputation.

I knew I would be busy once I arrived here, but I was busier than I thought. Kim Hyun-Sung's face turned pale because I was sure he was more tired than I was. It had been a little over two days since we arrived at the city, and unlike Jung Ha-Yan who was recharging, Kim Hyun-Sung was exhausted.

'I feel the same way… '

There were a lot of things I had to think about. Like the Blue Guild's future, my job, and the business with Kim Hyun-Sung. However, there was only one I was concerned about the most. I was sure he and I had different opinions, but Kim Hyun-Sung was probably thinking about the same thing, as we were in the same situation. The tutorial dungeon was going to open soon, so he must be thinking about the talented people he knew in his past coming out of the tutorial dungeon. Kim Hyun-Sung had to think about the people that would play a big part in the future, and he had to think about the new position he would get. I didn't know what would happen in the future, but he knew. There would be a lot of situations and discussions where we would have to come to an agreement. Of course, it included dragging our exhausted bodies and working till late at night. Naturally, we both avoided having deep conversations, but it didn't get in the way of having conversations like this, as we were friends and comrades who trusted each other.

"*Whew*… it has been a long day…" Kim Hyun-Sung let out a sigh.

“It will probably be busier tomorrow since we need to prepare for the inauguration ceremony. I think we’re going to be the last ones. *Ahem*. Anyway, there are a few more people you need to meet, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I told him.

“…”

“You need to meet Father Andurin and the influential noblewomen…” I continued.

“*Ah…*”

He seemed like he wanted me to stop. He didn’t mind meeting Father Andurin, but I guess he felt uncomfortable meeting the noblewomen. I smiled when I saw his expression.

“*Ahem*. If you feel uncomfortable, then I’ll meet with the noblewomen,” I offered.

“You don’t have to…” he mumbled.

“It’s fine. I have some free time anyway,” I replied.

“Th-Thank you…”

It had been a while since Kim Hyun-Sung sincerely thanked me for something, and after looking at Jung Ha-Yan, who had fallen asleep, Kim Hyun-Sung continued talking, “It’s been a year…”

“Time passed a lot faster than I thought. We’ve been so busy that a year has already passed. Honestly, you have no idea how surprised I was when you mentioned preparing for the new recruits.” I confessed.

“*Hahaha*. So you’re forgetful as well,” he remarked.

“I’m only human. It’s honestly pretty tiring to handle the issues going on right now,” I said.

“That’s not true. I… I don’t think you’re just human at all, Mr. Ki-Young,” he complimented me.

“I was just lucky. If I didn’t meet you back then, I wouldn’t have been able to escape the tutorial dungeon, and I’m sure it would have been the same for you,” I told him.

“This is a bit of a serious topic, but you’ve been a big help recently, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung suddenly said.

I felt proud when he said that. The mood between us wasn’t that bad, as we did have a few drinks at the dinner we had been invited to earlier. There were things we both wanted to say to each other, and it was frustrating that we had a hard time talking about it, but at very least, we seemed peaceful.

“You know…”

Kim Hyun-Sung started talking.

“Tell me that I’m doing a good job, too…”

Jung Ha-Yan talked in her sleep, which made Kim Hyun-Sung laugh. He continued talking, but this time, he sounded pretty serious.

“I just thought of something.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“It’s about the current state of the Blue Guild,” he replied.

“I see. Is there a problem related to expanding the number of members…”

“That’s right. I’m sure we’ll need more time, but I feel like we need to reorganize the guild system and the current parties,” he answered.

“*Hm…*”

“When the new recruits arrive, I think it’ll be inefficient to only have one party under the Blue Guild. I’m still planning it out, but I’m thinking about creating a second party and letting Mr. Deok-Gu and Miss Jung-Yeon take charge of them.” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“*Ahhh…*”

I had no choice but to remain quiet, but it wasn’t like I had anything to say about it, as it seemed like he and I were thinking about the same thing. Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t say it outright, but he thought that maybe Park Deok-Gu was having a hard time

keeping up with his party.

'I wonder if there's a decent tank from the new recruits.'

It was possible. If we had a vanguard who would become a key member in the future, then it would be more efficient to recruit them as a party member. It was a bit surprising, but I didn't think Kim Hyun-Sung was looking down on Park Deok-Gu.

'That bastard! Let's just abandon him since he's weak!'

He wasn't saying this out loud. Kim Hyun-Sung understood Park Deok-Gu's limits, and it was a reasonable choice to train him as a clan's executive member instead of keeping him as a party member. He wanted Park Deok-Gu to become a party leader, and he wanted to watch him grow while gaining experience. I was sure Park Deok-Gu's dignity and position would increase within the guild, but in the end, he would be further apart from Kim Hyun-Sung's party. Honestly, if Lee Sang-Hee returned to the battlefield, then she could become a key member of Kim Hyun-Sung's party, and he wouldn't need to be so critical of Park Deok-Gu.

'Especially about his safety.'

Kim Hyun-Sung's party would continue to grow, and the party would visit new places in the future, which meant Park Deok-Gu would continuously have to face new dangers. Objectively speaking, he could only block one or two attacks with his stats, and in the worst-case scenario, he could die outright.

'Unlike me who's in the rear.'

However, keeping him in Kim Hyun-Sung's party by moving him to the rear wouldn't be beneficial for his growth. I was sure Kim Hyun-Sung had considered all of this, and the reason why he brought this up was that he wanted my opinion, as I was the closest to Park Deok-Gu.

'When considering Park Deok-Gu's growth, safety and growing him as an executive member of the guild, Kim Hyun-Sung's offer may be a better option, but… '

For some reason, it felt kind of cruel leaving the guy behind.

'Shit… '

I wasn't the only one who knew about Park Deok-Gu's limits. Kim Hyun-Sung had to know Park Deok-Gu's limits better than me, as he watched the latter closely and even fought with him on a few battlefields.

"I understand what you're trying to say, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said.

"Great…"

"If I'm not misunderstanding you then… you're probably talking about Deok-Gu… am I right?" I asked.

"That's right. I'm curious about what you think of him. For this issue… I believe your decision is more important than mine, so that's why I told you first. I think… I think that you know better than I do and if you consider the fact that things will become even more dangerous in the future…" he explained.

"Well…"

The answer was already in my head, but I felt like I couldn't say it.

'This is annoying… shit… '

It was nice that he asked for my opinion, but I couldn't help but hate Kim Hyun-Sung, as it felt like he was telling me to make the cruel decision. As such, I couldn't give him an answer. Ultimately, I had no choice but to reply with a reasonable answer.

"I…"

CHAPTER 189
A FOOL (3)

"I…"

"…"

"I think it'll be fine if we just keep an eye on him for now," I suggested.

I was lying. I didn't think it was going to be fine. I knew better than anyone that Park Deok-Gu was doing his best, but if I were asked whether he would be able to catch up to Kim Hyun-Sung, I would have no choice but to shake my head, as that was the reality. Actually, he wouldn't be able to catch up to Jo Hye-Jin, let alone Kim Hyun-Sung, so objectively speaking, kicking him out of the party was the right decision.

'Maybe I've grown fond of him… '

I thought maybe I really had grown fond of him, as it felt like I was trying to reason with myself. Anyway, Park Deok-Gu relied on me for many things, and he was basically my follower, as he considered me trustworthy. I was sure we would have to remove him from the party someday, but I didn't want that to happen so soon. I didn't want a new tank joining the party, as my influence over the party would decrease. I also didn't want to waste time training the new recruits to become my followers. At the least, I was sure Park Deok-Gu was someone who could throw his life away for me. I didn't know how he would *really* act in that kind of situation, but I was certain he wouldn't run away.

'Because he's trying… '

I thought trusting him a bit more wasn't a bad idea.

"I see," Kim Hyun-Sung said, nodding.

It felt like Kim Hyun-Sung released a short sigh, so I had no choice but to continue talking, "I know very well that if the vanguard falls, the entire party will be in danger, but I still think there are areas we can improve on, like items. I'm sure there are

many methods out there. More importantly, Deok-Gu has been working very hard, so I'm sure we'll still earn *something*, even if it's not that big of a profit."

'That something may be really small, though… I honestly don't have high expectations.'

"He seemed like he has been training in places the other members can't see, and I even saw him sparring with Ye-Ri recently. Of course, I'm not in the position to evaluate them properly, but it seemed like they were doing a good job," I continued.

'He was beaten up pretty badly, though.'

"He's determined," I added.

'Determination is useless… '

"I'm sure he's slowly improving," I said.

'The problem is that it's too slow.'

"I believe he'll show a slightly different side during the next expedition. I'm sure of it," I told him.

'I can't say for sure. Hyun-Sung… shit… '

I was used to lying, but this lie was kind of sloppy, as I was busy protecting Park Deok-Gu by expressing an illogical opinion. It wasn't like me to act this way, but when I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung, I saw him smiling.

"I understand," he said.

He looked really happy. I couldn't really describe it, but he looked as if he was happy that he had guessed right. It was like a burden was lifted from his shoulders.

'This guy… no way… '

I couldn't help but think he was testing me, because, until recently, our regressor had been kind of wary and suspicious of me. He had a sly side to him, but if he *really* was testing me through this issue, then he was even more sly than I thought. It was possible he had brought this up because he had doubts about the cold-blooded part of me. I even became a bit suspicious that maybe this was part of Park Deok-Gu's

plan…

'I'm sure it's not… '

Anyway, Kim Hyun-Sung nodded while smiling. I had a lot of complicated thoughts, and before I could respond with an awkward smile, Kim Hyun-Sung spoke, "I fully understand what you're thinking, Mr. Ki-Young. Just now, I told you that I would trust your decision, but I'm sure the day will come where our party members and even Mr. Deok-Gu will be in danger."

"Yes… I'm aware of that, too," I replied.

"We'll keep an eye on him for now, but if he doesn't show results in his growth or training, we'll go with my suggestion… and create a second party. Of course, I think it'll be better if you decide when we should put my plan into motion, because I'm sure you'll realize the appropriate time even without me saying anything," he suggested.

"Alright. Let's do that," I agreed.

'Does that mean he's going to give him a few more chances?'

It meant that Kim Hyun-Sung was going to keep an eye on Park Deok-Gu, but regardless of the reason, I had gotten what I wanted. If he didn't show any progress during the dungeon expeditions and hunts we would do in the future, he would be placed in the second party, but it was good news that he wasn't going to be immediately expelled out of the party. In this case, there was only one thing I could do.

'Make him stronger… '

It would be difficult for Park Deok-Gu to get stronger by himself, but I had many ways to help him get stronger. As I had mentioned earlier to Kim Hyun-Sung, I could get him an item, or I could use alchemy to make his body physically stronger. Of course, there was the question of whether I could even achieve that, but if I obtained a legendary-ranked job, it was possible.

The first condition to getting stronger in this world was to possess anything legendary-ranked—that was the first step. As I was able to find a way to grow despite my pathetic stats, I was sure Park Deok-Gu could do the same, as he was

more talented than me. It was funny how much effort I was putting into this matter, but if this was Kim Hyun-Sung's way of extending the test he had given me, then there was no reason for me not to try it.

'This is the last time I'm going to take care of you, Deok-Gu.'

It wasn't because I was concerned for him. I was a busy person, and I had a lot of things to handle. However, Park Deok-Gu's drooping and pitiful back kept showing up in my head, so I thought it would be good to spend some time helping him.

"I'll head out first, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said.

"Alright…"

"By the way, what were you going to say earlier…" I asked.

"It's nothing. I'll tell you the next time we have a drink," he replied.

"*Oh…* okay," I mumbled.

"I trust you, Mr. Ki-Young," he added.

'That fox… I knew he was testing me.'

"*Haha*… I'll see you tomorrow," I said and chuckled.

"Okay…"

I carried the sleepy Jung Ha-Yan and left Kim Hyun-Sung's room. She was pretty heavy, but I was stronger than an ordinary person, so I had no trouble taking her to her room. I guess she must have fallen asleep, as she was tired from all the walking we did today, but that made it easier for me to move. After all, if she found out where I was headed right now, I knew she wouldn't like it.

After closing the door, I walked away at a brisk pace. I was planning on visiting her anyway, so this was the perfect time. I had kept pushing back our meeting, as I had been too lazy and busy, but now, I had a good reason to visit her.

I had decided to help Park Deok-Gu, but I honestly had no idea where to start, as I didn't know exactly what was preventing him from growing. I couldn't even diagnose

him myself. I wasn't a counselor, as I could only read status windows and peek at a person's nature. Park Deok-Gu's magic stats were incredibly low, but his stamina and endurance stats were above epic rank. Yet, he was growing *really* slowly despite that. Of course, that wasn't the only problem. It broke my heart to say this, but when it came to battle sense, he was also below par compared to the other players around Kim Hyun-Sung.

'If I were to be honest… '

Even if Kim Ye-Ri's stats were lower than Park Deok-Gu's, he wouldn't be able to defeat her, as every person had varying levels of battle sense. It was the same as someone having legendary-ranked magic and intelligence, yet still being less knowledgeable than Jung Ha-Yan when it came to magic.

Not only was Park Deok-Gu having a hard time keeping up with the others in stats, but he was also lacking in experience and battle sense. To make things worse, he still had a rare-ranked job, and his attribute was still unavailable.

'It's a mess… '

There was hope in the fact that his attribute was still unavailable, but there wasn't much you could do about the battle sense one possessed. I also had to check Park Deok-Gu in the future. I wanted to see a stronger Park Deok-Gu, as seeing that would help me figure out how to help him grow.

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't know that much about Park Deok-Gu and me, but the shaman who knew the future me might know something about Park Deok-Gu.

Before I even got to her room, a Yozora guild member greeted me first. When I waved my hand, the door automatically opened, and like last time, she was lying stretched out on the ground.

'Kasugano Yuno.'

Her long hair was loose as usual, and her eyes were closed. The shaman I had met by chance started talking, "I've been waiting for you, Master."

"I'm sorry for not meeting with you earlier," I said.

"It's fine. The fact that you're here is a great honor, as I know better than anyone else

that you live a busy life. Please come in…" she offered.

"Did you know I was coming?" I asked.

"I-I didn't know," she stuttered.

"Then…"

"I waited until you came to me, as I was certain you would visit…" she answered.

I didn't know what to say.

"It must've been hard," I commented.

"That's not true. The thought of waiting for you made me feel a bit better… I actually enjoyed it," she explained.

'This is why… I can't be with her.'

"*Ahem.*"

"I'm sure you came because you have business with me," she said.

Kasugano Yuno seemed a bit disappointed when she became certain that I only came to visit her because I had business to do with her. I felt bad, but I couldn't tell her that I came to see her. I visited her because I needed her help, and I didn't have a lot of time. I was sure this wasn't enough for her, so when I quietly sat down, I patted the seat next to me. She slowly got up and sat next to me. As expected, she looked happy. She wasn't like Jung Jung Ha-Yan, who often expressed her feelings openly, so it seemed like she was trying to hide her smile.

"Well, I guess you can say I came here for a different reason," I told her.

"Knowing that you understand my feelings is more than enough to make me feel happy. I feel like I can fly. Master, please tell me your wish," Yuno requested.

Hearing her say that made me think that it wouldn't be bad to go straight to the point, as she seemed happy just by being with me. I actually had a lot of questions regarding Park Deok-Gu.

“It’s regarding the Dark World,” I started.

“Okay…”

“You said you found me in a ruin, right?” I asked.

“Yes. I found you as you were dying,” she answered.

“So… that happens two years from now, right?”

“That’s right. I don’t know the exact date, but I believe it’s two or three years from now,” she responded.

I had a question about that.

“Was I the only one there? Were there others? Like…”

Before I could finish, Kasugano Yuno spoke, “You’re asking about that big-framed man.”

“Do you know him?” I asked.

Kasugano Yuno opened her eyes and looked at me. I saw darkness where her eyes were supposed to be. I felt a shiver down my spine, as this was something you would usually only see in horror movies.

‘Don’t look at me… ’

CHAPTER 190
A FOOL (4)

Kasugano Yuno opened her eyes and looked at me. I saw darkness where her eyes were supposed to be. I felt a shiver down my spine, as this was something you would usually only see in horror movies.

'Don't look at me… '

If I knew she would open her eyes, I would've told her not to look at me, but it seemed like she couldn't see my expression. She looked as if she was looking at something else that wasn't me, so I thought maybe she was looking into the Dark World right now. When she suddenly closed her mouth and started shaking, she became completely different. Since Kasugano Yuno's visions were limited and random, I would be happy if she saw the part of the future I wanted her to see.

'Not bad… '

The fact that she knew Park Deok-Gu meant my assumption was correct. She couldn't check what my past life was like before meeting her, but based on my nature, it was highly likely that I had lived a similar lifestyle in my past life. When I was first summoned, it was easy to guess that I stuck with Park Deok-Gu at the time, and it happened again in my second life, as out of all the people there, he looked the most reliable. He might not be *that* strong right now, but I remembered thinking how great his initial stats were.

'It's highly likely that I didn't make contact with Hyun-Sung since he wasn't a regressor… '

I didn't know whether his potential stats had been high or not in the past life, but I probably hadn't stuck with him the way I was doing right now. If I didn't have anyone to rely on, then it was safe to assume that I must have held onto Park Deok-Gu like he was my lifeline. I was sure I had experienced many things, but I could easily conclude that I had stayed with Park Deok-Gu until I met Kasugano Yuno. There were a few variables I was worried about: if I had met him after meeting Yuno, if our relationship had soured, if I had backstabbed him, and so on.

‘I’m sure Park Deok-Gu didn't abandon me first.’

That was undeniable…

All of a sudden, Kasugano Yuno grabbed my hand.

‘She scared me!’

When I unknowingly looked at her black eyes, I realized something was shining.

‘Huh?’

[Viewing limited information due to outside intervention. Confirming the activation of Mind’s Eye, a legendary-ranked attribute.]

‘Huh?’

[The eye that can see Player Kasugano Yuno’s attributes, essence, past, and future is not resisting.]

“What…”

Before I could do anything, I saw the Dark World that Kasugano Yuno had been telling me about, and I finally realized how it got that name. I couldn’t describe it in words, but I had managed to get a glimpse of her memories before. At the time, I had seen myself choking her, but she was missing in the scene I was looking at right now. All I saw was Park Deok-Gu and myself. Similar to what she had mentioned, the scene was like an unedited video or a collage.

Anyway, the Park Deok-Gu and the other me I was seeing were kind of different from what we currently looked like. Our present selves were wearing luxurious coats and expensive equipment, but this version of Park Deok-Gu and me looked shabby. We could be perfectly described as third-rate adventurers that had just come out of the slums. We looked miserable, but more importantly, my body looked abnormal.

'Hey… I'm sorry… ' Park Deok-Gu said.

'For what?' the other me asked.

'About today's hunt. I should've done better… ' he replied.

'Don't worry about it, Deok-Gu. It was our first time, and we got paid anyway,' the other me said, comforting him.

'They were a good party, but… I don't think they'll call for us anymore… ' he muttered.

'I told you not to worry about that. I'll take care of the rest,' the other me reassured him.

'But still… ' he said.

'It's obvious what those guys are thinking anyway. Oh, you can head home first,' the other me told him.

'Do you have plans today too?' he asked.

'The vice-captain of the Golden Horse Clan,' the other me answered.

'You're having dinner with her again?' Park Deok-Gu asked.

'Hey, don't be so sad. This will help us,' the other me said.

'That woman… I've heard bad things about her… ' he commented.

'That's none of your concern. You just focus on your training and remember. If I can do it… '

'…'

'If I can do it, you can do even better,' the other me said, finishing my sentence.

'…'

The scene changed once again. I didn't know where I was, but I didn't think I was in Lindel, as from what I knew, Lindel didn't have a hunting ground like this. Park Deok-

Gu and I actually looked like adventurers, and it seemed like we were able to get rid of the shabby clothing from earlier. Park Deok-Gu looked like a warrior now, and I looked like a mage, so even in the Dark World, I guess I hadn't taken the Leader path. I didn't know which job I had chosen next, but I probably hadn't picked alchemist, as I didn't receive Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy from Kim Hyun-Sung, so there would have been no reason for me to pick that job.

'Hyung-nim!' Park Deok-Gu called out.

'Pay attention, you pig! Didn't I tell you that I'll kill you if you turn around for something stupid?' the other me scolded.

'But hyung-nim… magic… ' he pointed out.

'Don't worry about me, just look out for yourself,' the other me told him.

'O-Okay,' he stuttered.

His movement wasn't that bad, but if I had to describe it, I was like a mage wielding a spear while Park Deok-Gu was like a naive vanguard. It looked like we had a good relationship with the other party members. I wasn't sure if we had started a guild, but we didn't seem to be part of any group.

I guess I was pretty skilled with the spear from the way I was casting spells while using it, but Park Deok-Gu looked like he was making a lot of mistakes despite his strong appearance. It was like the time when he couldn't overcome the trauma he had received when we had entered the Garden of Horror. In the end, a monster that the vanguard had missed ambushed a priest in the back, and I saw myself jumping in front of the priest. The small monster did injure me, but the battle ended when I swung my spear. I comforted the furious priest, and Park Deok-Gu lowered his head.

'I'm sorry… ' he apologized.

'Do you think apologizing will fix everything? I followed you because I trusted your endurance, but geez… ' the priest complained.

'Y-You see… '

'Hey, stop being hesitant and speak properly. I'm so annoyed right now. Just know that I'm letting it go because of Mr. Ki-Young. Do you know how many times this has

happened? I don't understand why you changed your job to a tank if you're going to act that way. I think Castle Rock has been hiring people… so why not run over and do some labor work? Things have been bad because of the bastards from Celia, and everyone has been going on hunts these days… How ridiculous… ' the priest continued.

'Let me apologize in his place, Miss Ga-Hee. I guess he's not in his best condition today because he's usually not like this,' the other me explained.

'I'm letting this go because of you, Mr. Ki-Young… ' she emphasized.

'I'm sure he'll get used to it once time passes. Since the issue has been resolved now, why don't we… I'll buy you food later,' the other me offered.

'Lunch or dinner?' she asked.

'Dinner, of course,' the other me replied.

'Then… I guess I can keep going. By the way, have you thought about the guild's offer?' she asked.

'I still have other business to take care of, so I haven't… haha… I'll give you my answer once I'm done taking care of my business,' the other me answered.

'I'll be waiting,' she said.

The background changed once again. This time, we were probably heading back from a hunt.

'Hyung-nim… ' Park Deok-Gu called out.

'I told you to stop looking back and focus, you pig!' the other me scolded him.

'W-Well… I'm sorry… ' he apologized.

'There's no need to apologize since hunting wasn't our real objective anyway… In the end, we got paid pretty well,' the other me told him.

'Where are you going?' he asked.

'That's none of your business,' the other me answered.

'Is it regarding… '

'Shut up!' the other me ordered him.

'I-I'm sorry,' he apologized once again.

'You don't have to worry about anything else and just follow me. I'll do the rest. We got our foot in the door, and the thing you're worried about won't happen. This is part of the climbing up process,' the other me explained.

'Still… wouldn't joining a decent guild… ' he suggested.

'You just need to shut up and remember one thing. If I can do it… '

'I can do better,' Park Deok-Gu finished the other me's sentence.

'That's right. Also… I'll think more about what you said, Deok-Gu,' the other me added.

'Thanks… ' he mumbled.

I saw many other scenes aside from this, and even though they weren't exactly useful, I saw myself drinking with him, yelling at him, and kicking him. Different scenes quickly flashed before me, and I felt sad whenever I saw an important scene.

'Don't forget, Deok-Gu,' the other me said.

'I know,' he replied.

As I continued watching the scenes, I found it interesting how Park Deok-Gu's stats never increased that much despite the scenes being in a future way later than the present. I was a bit skeptical, but the guy *really* didn't grow even after such a long time.

'Don't forget,' the other me reminded him.

'I know. If you can do it… ' Park Deok-Gu started.

'As long as you remember,' the other me said, interrupting him.

I was curious about how he grew in the future, but the scenes I saw were all useless

memories.

'Are you tired?' the other me asked.

'H-How could you be so cold, hyung-nim?' he asked.

'It's because you need to kill to live. I don't think it's a big deal because, in this place, all you do is kill. Don't forget. If I can do it… ' the other me said.

'If you can do it… I can do even better," Park Deok-Gu replied.

'That's it,' the other me said, nodding.

When the scene changed again, I saw Park Deok-Gu running around frantically while carrying me on his back. I thought there was a time skip, but this part wasn't so bad. I didn't think we were in Lindel, but it seemed like we had become somewhat successful. I would've been more satisfied with this if I wasn't bleeding on Park Deok-Gu's back.

'Hyung-nim, can you hear me?' Park Deok-Gu asked.

'Yeah… ' the other me replied weakly.

'If you die… '

'Stop talking nonsense. I don't plan on dying,' the other me interrupted him.

'I'm sorry, hyung-nim. I'm sorry,' he apologized.

'What are you apologizing for?' the other me asked.

'It's because of what I said… ' he replied.

'It's fine. I wasn't really listening to what you were saying, so don't worry about it. There was just a miscalculation. It was my fault for trusting those hypocrites. You didn't do anything wrong, you big pig,' the other me reassured him.

'But still, it's because of me… because of me… w-we should've followed… your plan… ' he stuttered.

'That's right, you pig. It's all because of you, so keep running. Reflecting like this will probably help you do better next time, right?' the other me asked.

There were a lot of spells, spears and arrows flying all over the place. The way Park Deok-Gu was running while carrying me made him look desperate, and I could understand his desperation. I had no idea what was going on, but based on our conversation, Park Deok-Gu had probably made a suggestion and I had accepted it. In the end, things hadn't worked out, but he must have helped me escape the problem. Anyway, it seemed like this chase had lasted for a while. Park Deok-Gu tried to escape while blocking the arrows with his body, and he crushed those in his way with his sword. However, there was a limit to everything. He may have been able to stop the pursuers, but he couldn't block all the magic and arrows falling from the sky.

'I can't ask you to abandon me, you pig,' the other me said.

'I thought you would tell me to do that, hyung-nim,' he commented.

'Still, you should leave me. Since your body is strong, I'm sure you'll survive. Well… I am kind of scared, but I don't regret my life… I think it'll be great if you could avenge my death… '

'Are you trying to be sentimental so that I won't abandon you?' he asked.

'You bastard… ' the other me cursed.

'No matter what you say, I won't abandon you, so stop with the nonsense. I'm going to save you, hyung-nim,' he said with determination.

'Stop arguing and let me go,' the other me ordered.

'I'm not bluffing. I'm really going to save you, hyung-nim. D-Do you remember?' Park Deok-Gu asked.

'About what?' the other me asked.

'Do you remember how many times you saved me?' he asked.

'I wasn't intentionally trying to save you. You showed promise, and that's why I cared for you… ' the other me replied.

'I don't think that's the case. No matter what you say, you basically saved my life, both physically and mentally. Thank you for getting hurt because of this stupid brother of yours,' he said.

'I can't let you die… Do you know how much I invested in you? I need to get all that back… '

'Thank you for defending me back at the dungeon and thank you for choosing me. No matter how much I try to remember, it seems like I was being constantly saved by you, hyung-nim. That's honestly all I can remember. What I'm trying to say is… I owe you a lot, so it's my turn now… '

'We're going to end up dying together,' the other me warned him.

'I told you that I'm going to save you, hyung-nim. Don't forget,' he repeated.

'Forget what?'

'If you can do it… I can do even better,'

'…'

'If you can do it, I can do… even better,' he repeated.

'…'

'If you can… do it… I can do…,' he said once again.

'…'

'I can do… even better…,'

'…'

'If you… can do it… '

'…'

'Do… bet… ter… '

‘…’

‘I… can… ’

‘…’

‘…’

Then I saw Kasugano Yuno looking for me.

CHAPTER 191
A FOOL (5)

I could see the other me lying down quietly in an unfamiliar setting, and Kasugano Yuno was there as well. The scenery was definitely different from the one I was in before. Unlike earlier, where I heard explosions and screams, all I could hear were birds chirping. The room I was in wasn't luxurious, but it was neat. However, it seemed that the other me couldn't move. Now that I thought about it, I had seen myself lying in this room when I saw my past life through Kasugano Yuno. I guess I must have spent my time here after she found me.

I had no idea how much time had passed since I fainted, but one thing I was sure of was that the Lee Ki-Young in the Dark World didn't seem normal. The fact that the other me couldn't move was one thing, but half of his body was destroyed. I guess this was the result of Park Deok-Gu's best efforts to save him. It was a miracle that he had survived the attacks, and if Kasugano Yuno hadn't found him, he would have died a slow death. He probably couldn't move any part of his body, and his consciousness must be the only part still operational.

Kasugano Yuno quietly opened the door and spoke after approaching him.

'How pitiful.'

'…'

'I feel really bad for you.'

She looked more mature here, and her hair was a little longer since I was looking at her two years in the future, and the mood she gave off was calmer compared to today.

'I know you have a lot of questions. I can't tell you anything right now, but I suggest you focus on recovering,' she said.

'…'

'I guess I haven't introduced myself yet. My name is Kasugano Yuno. I'm sure you've heard of my name before. I don't really have that big of a reputation, though… '

'…'

'Yes, you're probably already aware. I'll explain later how you got here. I honestly can't guarantee that your body will recover, but if you have the will, I believe you'll be able to go back to doing normal activities,' she explained.

'…'

'I guess I've been talking too much… '

'…'

'I'll leave you be for today. I'll… come back tomorrow,' she informed the other me.

The other me in the Dark World couldn't see Kasugano Yuno leaving, and since his eyes were fixated on the ceiling, I was sure he couldn't even see her face. However, the other me was probably thinking about a variety of things. For some reason, I knew what the other me was worried about and what the other me was feeling based on their frantic expression.

Park Deok-Gu had died. This was the reason why the other me in the Dark World looked so shaken. He must have recalled this fact, and how he kept crying without being able to move or scream made him look really miserable. I guess the other me in that world was more sentimental than my current self, and I couldn't help but acknowledge that seeing myself in that state had shaken me up a bit. I was watching all this from a third-person perspective, but technically, I wasn't a third party.

I quietly watched as the Dark World version of me continued to cry because he had no way of relieving his anger, and after a few days, Kasugano Yuno visited the other me again. Technically, this wasn't her first visit because she was looking after him. I didn't know why she was treating him so well, but I knew she thought of the other me as a difficult person to take care of. The Kasugano Yuno in the Dark World knew that she was going to be with the other me in the future. The Lee Ki-Young in the Dark World probably didn't know, but I knew she was a shaman who could see into the past and future, so I realized why she was so devoted to the other me. She was probably thinking if she could change the Dark World version of me because she pitied me.

The scenery changed once again. The background remained the same, but the other me was able to talk and move now.

'You're awake,' the other Kasugano Yuno said.

'…'

'I brought you food,' she continued.

'I can… eat it myself,' the other me told her.

'I'm sure it's still difficult for you to move your body,' she argued.

'I don't need… '

'Didn't I tell you it's going to be hard for you to move? Please give it to me. I'll feed you,'

'…'

She was devoted to the other me, but it seemed like he didn't trust her. It was natural for him to be wary of her because even I wouldn't trust her in that condition. I wasn't sure if she had noticed it, but the other me didn't really look friendly.

'Why did you save me? Actually, let me change my question. What's the eye that can see through the essence, future and the past? Do you know about the future? Or, did you know this was going to happen?' asked the other me.

'The information given to me is limited. I don't know everything in the past or the future,' she answered.

'If that's the case… why did you save me?' the other me asked again.

'That's—'

'You know the future me.' The other me pointed out.

Kasugano Yuno didn't answer, which meant the other me was right. The Dark World version of me was probably doubtful about the reason for her kindness and why she had saved me.

The scene changed once again during all of this, and there was a time skip.

As usual, she was nursing me with devotion, and despite being suspicious of her, it seemed like the other me was opening up to her a bit. She even started having random conversations with him about her childhood, stories about her surroundings and life, as well as things about herself. The topic always changed; sometimes, she would talk more about her feelings. I wasn't sure about this, but at this point, I was thinking that she was in love with the other me. The Dark World version of me hadn't realized it, but the expression I saw on Kasugano Yuno's face was the expression of a woman in love. It seemed to me that she was always thinking of the other me and what she had to do for me every day.

After finishing her difficult tasks, she would immediately visit my room to spend time with the other me, and sometimes, she would start crying after leaving him behind. A small compliment would make her happy, and a slight frustration from the other me would make her sad. She wrote letters and even had sleepless nights because she kept on thinking of the other me.

'Why are you being kind to me?' asked the other me for the first time.

'…'

She couldn't give me an answer, but her face turned red as she looked down.

The Dark World version of me continued to suffer. As time passed, the pain of the past started to heal along with the physical injuries, but of course, it seemed like the Lee Ki-Young in that world didn't want that. The other me started drinking on his own more often, and he would either lose his temper or suppress his anger. I was sure he was reminiscing those memories he had with Park Deok-Gu because he knew they would become his driving force.

Kasugano Yuno started looking into the future more often, and it was as if she wanted to peek into the future she couldn't see. It was obvious why she was obsessed with the future. This scene was probably when the other me and she were thinking about completely different futures, and to see the future she wanted, she continued to consume her stats. I wanted to tell her that what she was doing was dumb, but I couldn't speak, as I was just a spectator.

Time passed some more…

The condition of the Dark World version of me had improved to the point where he could now completely move his body. Kasugano Yuno's visit had also become more frequent recently. They talked about trivial things, and this was probably when the other me started having various thoughts. I didn't know what the other me was thinking, but the interesting part was that the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World seemed to be thinking whether he should use her or simply accept her kindness. His dilemma seemed pretty risky even in my eyes that I had no words to say about it. After all, the Dark World version of me was relying on Kasugano Yuno.

'Mr. Lee Ki-Young, it's time to drink your tea,' the other Kasugano Yuno said.

'Oh, thanks.'

'I think I should take a look at your body today. It hasn't completely recovered… '

'I'm fine. I don't have any problems moving around,' the other me interrupted her.

'But… '

'Is taking care of children a hobby of yours?' the other me asked.

'I-It's not that. It's just… ' she stuttered.

The other me joked around with her more often to the point that the nice atmosphere seemed absurd, but it was to be expected because she was devoted to him, and even though the other me hadn't said anything, I knew the other me was mentally cornered. In some ways, it seemed like they were growing their newly developed love, but as the spectator, I thought it wasn't going to turn out so well because the other me was thinking about leaving Kasugano Yuno, at the very least.

Even though the Kasugano Yuno hadn't expressed it, I knew she was afraid of losing Lee Ki-Young, and she was stressed that his injuries; mental and physical were recovering. Kasugano Yuno probably couldn't see it because she seemed to be in a dreamy state, but in my eyes, Lee Ki-Young looked like a bomb about to explode.

The scenery and the background changed once more. This time. It seemed like she and the other me had gotten closer to each other, but the Dark World version of me was instinctively rejecting it. Winter passed and spring arrived for Kasugano Yuno. The scenery was stating to become greener, and then it was summer. The season changed once again and leaves started falling.

'I'm leaving,' the other me announced.

'I-I don't understand what you're saying,' Kasugano Yuno stuttered.

'I think you know what I'm talking about,' the other me told her.

'Y-You can stay a bit longer,' she offered.

A leaf fell.

'Y-You haven't fully recovered yet,' she added.

'I know better than anyone that my body is now fine,' the other me said.

'That's… not true. I need to take care of your body more,' she argued.

'…'

'Please… don't leave, Mr Lee Ki-Young,' she begged.

Another leaf fell.

'I appreciate what you have done for me. After the first time, I didn't ask you again why you were kind to me, but I think I have an idea now,' the other me explained.

'…'

'I'm thankful, but that's it. I'm going to make up for my mistakes by killing a lot of people. I'm going to become more heartless and cruel. That's the kind of future you probably saw, or you could have seen my last moments,' the other me added.

'That's not true. It's nothing like that. That's not what I saw, Mr Lee Ki-Young. Wh-What I saw was… us being together,' she replied in a stutter.

Yet, another leaf fell.

'I saw us together. I saw it… with my own eyes. I saw us living together in this house, and we looked ha-happy. We had two children, and although I didn't hear their names, I'm certain they were kind children,' she added.

'…'

'You loved me and cared for me.'

'You're lying.' the other me pointed out.

'I-It's true. You and I were living a peaceful life. Yes, both of us looked happy. Not just me, but you seemed happy, too, and we were living a normal life. The reason why I looked for you was that the future I saw bothered me. I didn't have any other intentions,' she explained.

'You're lying. I can see it in your eyes… also… I don't have the option of wasting my time here,' the other me said to her.

'You were stroking my head and whispering to me that you loved me. Y-You forgot about everything and was living a happy life. D-Destiny! That's right. I-It was destiny. I think… this is destiny. I-I think it's fate that… you and I have freed ourselves from all the pain, oppression, and the restraints of the past to live a happy life,' she added.

A leaf fell.

'Forget what?' the other me asked.

'The p-pain… You seemed like you had forgotten about your pain. I didn't see you being miserable in the future, and you weren't drinking to forget about your pain anymore. You didn't seem like you were suffering and were always smiling. You really looked happy. E-Even about them… ' she cautiously replied.

'What?' the other me asked.

'Ah… '

'Do you think I forgot?' the other me questioned her.

'M-Mr Lee Ki-Young… that's… not… '

'Do you really think I forgot just because I wasted my time here and spent time with you? Do you really think I actually forgot what those dirty hypocrites had done? You thought I forgot just because I didn't ask about them? Do you really think I forgot about that dumb pig who died in my place? You're saying that the future you saw was a

different future? You're telling me that's what you really saw?!' the other me yelled.

'That's—'

'Don't kid yourself. I didn't forget. Kasugano Yuno, you're like poison. I thought you were like medicine to me, but that's not the case. To me, you're poison. Destiny? Fine. I don't really understand what you're saying, but there's one thing I'm sure of. It was fate that I came here.'

'Ah… '

'It was fate that you brought me here. I was brought here so you can detoxify the poison that has been corroding me,' the other me continued.

'Mr Lee Ki-Young… Heuuuk… '

Yet, another leaf fell.

'I don't need your useless pity, you dirty bitch. All of you are the same,' the other me remarked.

'Ahhh… I pity you… '

'You think you deserve to pity me?' the other me asked her.

A leaf fell.

'Cough… cough… '

'Thanks to you, I was reminded of what I needed to do. You'll be an indicator,' the other me said.

'Cough… '

'You'll be an indicator that'll show just how cruel I can be. This was what you wanted, right? Am I right? It could be a bit different from the happy life that you wanted, but… at least you're by my side,' the other me added.

'Cough… cough… '

A leaf fell.

'I'm going to keep you by my side and keep thinking about them. You'll be the medium that'll keep me from forgetting about them. It's good for you as well. Am I right?' asked the other me.

'Please… don't' cry. My… love,' Yuno mumbled.

'…'

'Don't cry. My love… ' she repeated.

Another leaf fell, and the fool stepped on that leaf.

Winter…

Yet, another long winter had arrived.

CHAPTER 192
NOTHING HAPPENED

The moment I felt I was being bounced off somewhere, I couldn't help but jump up. I realized that I had returned to reality when the dark landscape around me had disappeared. As soon as I came back to my senses, I felt immense pain, and it was so painful that I couldn't even scream. Despite wanting to scream, it felt like my brain wasn't allowing it, so I had no choice but to open my mouth and grab my face.

'Ah… shit… '

This must be a side-effect of seeing the Dark World that Kasugano Yuno had seen. I felt like my eyes were going to burst, so as I suppressed my scream, I pressed my palms on my eyelids. I didn't even know this was possible, so this kind of side-effect was probably normal; however, the part that was kind of heartbreaking was that I wasn't intentionally trying to look into the Dark World. I wasn't sure if I was crying because of the pain, but tears started to pour down regardless of my will. This body of mine didn't seem like it had remembered its past life, but anyway, tears continued to flow out.

'What kind of… shitty situation is this?'

If someone asked if I was impressed, I would say yes. However, I wasn't really interested in how the Dark World version of me lived in that world. All I wanted to know was when, where, and how I died. It was natural for me to think this way because the Lee Ki-Young in the Dark World wasn't me, and I just wanted to know how long the present me would live.

I came here to find a way to strengthen Park Deok-Gu, but I had seen many different things instead. I had seen what happened to Kasugano Yuno, so I couldn't help but gulp upon recalling it. I had also seen what happened after that. I couldn't remember it clearly, but I swore I caught a glimpse of the winter in the Dark World. No matter how hard I tried to remember it, I couldn't remember anything. As such, I couldn't help but feel that whatever happened after that incident was irrelevant.

I had no choice but to get back on topic. I had an inkling about Kasugano Yuno's story

because she told me, but I had never imagined that I would see the details of it. What I saw was ridiculously catastrophic. Park Deok-Gu died protecting me, and I betrayed Kasugano Yuno.

'Tenacious piece of shit.'

If she wanted to kill me there, I certainly would have died. I was sure the piece of shit in the Dark World was certain she wasn't going to kill him, but it's undeniable that he had been gambling. For some reason, I recalled Kasugano Yuno's face as she cried while looking at me.

'How did she die?'

Kasugano Yuno had mentioned that she had died before me. I wasn't the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World, so I had no idea what was going through that bastard's head, but I believe he didn't kill her himself.

'Because I said I was going to keep her by my side.'

That was most likely it. Based on the stories she had told me, it seemed like the other me had spent a *really* long time with the other Kasugano Yuno, and since she was really useful, the other me probably hadn't done something dumb like kill her. In that case, I could assume that she died thanks to an incident.

I grabbed my face again when I felt the throbbing pain.

I kept thinking about Park Deok-Gu as well, not just Kasugano Yuno.

'Idiot… '

When she told me that I was the only one she had discovered, I thought that Park Deok-Gu must have died, but I had never imagined he would have such a heroic ending. My eyes did water a bit, but I felt like I was being too emotional, so I shook my head. The Park Deok-Gu in this life was still alive, after all. I thought that I had also gotten a good hint on how to help him grow… However, the situation would've been perfect if it wasn't for this throbbing pain.

"No… not that…" I mumbled.

I still had one question.

'Viewing limited information due to outside intervention. Confirming the activation of Mind's Eye, a legendary-ranked attribute.'

What did it mean by *outside intervention*? I had never read that kind of text while using Mind's Eye, and considering the fact that I had never activated it before, there had to be someone I didn't know who wanted to show that to me. If common sense was used, it was unrealistic to intervene with the Mind's Eye and the eyes that can see the essence, future, and past when they were activated since they were legendary-ranked attributes, so a human being couldn't have done this. A transcendent being must have done it.

'But why?'

To let me know that Kasugano and Park Deok-Gu were *that* important to me?

It wasn't a bad assumption because it felt like the two had destroyed that piece of the shit in the Dark World.

Maybe…

"This could be considered as encouragement?" I questioned.

I wasn't the only one that didn't want Park Deok-Gu to die.

"Because that fool was preventing me from doing certain things?" I questioned again.

Maybe, that was the answer. One thing I was sure of was that this being that had intervened didn't want me to face the same horrible situation I had faced in my past life. That was the only thing that transcendent being and I were in agreement with.

I visited Kasugano Yuno with a light heart, but I witnessed incredible scenes.

When I slightly turned my head to the side.

"*Uh… ugh…*"

"*Ah…*"

I noticed Kasugano Yuno lying beside me.

"*Uh…*"

It was a surprise to see her naked.

'What the… '

When I looked toward the window, the sun was already up. I knew I had spent a long time in the Dark World, but I had never imagined I would stay up all night, and I definitely didn't think I would be in this kind of situation.

'Shit.'

No way. When I raised the blanket, there was proof that she and I had made love. Kasugano Yuno looked happy, but I felt bad when I saw her body. I wasn't sure if the last scene I saw made me lose my mind, but we had *undeniably* explored each other. When I shook my head violently to prevent myself from thinking deeply about it, Kasugano Yuno woke up.

"*Oh…* master."

"You're awake," I said.

"I-I am…" she stuttered.

She was blushing, and she looked happy. The look on her face in the Dark World differed from her current expression, but it wasn't bad as long as she was happy. I had been neglecting her because she was living in Celia, and I had no idea if it was because of what I had seen yesterday, but she was cute. More than that, I had ruined the life of Kasugano Yuno in this life, so I was partly responsible for her. Moreover, I was the reason why she had a completely different personality from the Yuno in the Dark World.

She seemed embarrassed by the fact that she had made a move on me first.

I was *really* curious about something, so I asked while stroking her head.

"I have a question…"

"Please ask," Yuno responded.

“Were you the one who showed me the Dark World?” I asked.

“I-I didn’t, Master. I had also never imagined you would enter inside me and see the Dark World. You entered inside before I could even resist…” she mumbled a reply.

It sounded strange, but I had no choice but to nod.

“I see…”

“An unknown restraint suddenly came flooding in. I’m not sure if it’s because of that or you, but that was my first time staying in the Dark World for that long,” she added.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. It’s embarrassing for me to say this, but I usually see the scenes in pieces. Of course, I’m sure I’ll be able to see more if I develop a bit more, but… so far… *Oh!* Do you happen to know something, Master?” she asked.

“No, I have never heard of something like this. One thing I’m sure of is that I didn’t activate Mind’s Eye. Before I could look into you with my attribute, it was already activated, but nothing else changed other than that… Anyway, it was kind of a new experience. Seeing the world you had seen is already a great achievement,” I explained.

“Have you gained anything?” she asked.

“Quite a lot. Thanks,” I replied.

“*Ah*…”

“And thanks for what you had done in the Dark World,” I added.

“M-Master,” she muttered.

“I have another question,” I started.

“Yes?”

“It’s nothing serious, but… was the future you saw in the Dark World really a future where we were together?” I asked.

“I can’t confirm that, but I believe the dumb Kasugano in the Dark World had probably lied to stop you from leaving,” she answered.

“Really?”

“Yes, I’m sure of it. She probably wasn’t aware of your wrath, though. *Oh*, it could’ve been intentional,” she added.

“What?” I asked.

“It was probably because she wanted to be with you. The Dark World version of me—”

“I understand,” I said, interrupting her.

Basically, the lie she had told Lee Ki-Young to make him stay had made him unleash his wrath on her. As she had mentioned, the Dark World version of Kasugano Yuno could have intentionally turned on that switch to stop me from leaving, but I couldn’t help but think that her former assumption suited the situation more.

Anyway, the current situation wasn’t that bad.

When I nodded quietly and recalled the past events again, the feeling that I had forgotten something started to creep up on me.

‘Shit… ’

The moment I recalled what I had forgotten, I heard a voice outside, confirming that I had guessed right.

“Oppa! Oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan cried out.

‘That crazy… ’

I had forgotten about Jung Ha-Yan’s existence.

“You mustn't do this,” the guard told her.

“Let… me… go!” Jung Ha-Yan screamed.

Crack! Craaaack!

Those sounds confirmed that Jung Ha-Yan was approaching us with her magic. I wasn't sure if she was reacting that way because she thought I was in danger or because I made contact with someone, but regardless of the reason, anyone could see that I wasn't in the best situation.

"Yuno," I called out.

"Yes, Master," she replied.

Before I could suggest how to handle this situation, the wall next to us was destroyed, and I saw a familiar face. An absurd amount of mana enveloped her body, and I saw the madness in her eyes as she extended her hand out. She must have cried a lot because her eyes were swollen. Her hair was a mess, and it seemed like she was glaring at Kasugano Yuno. I couldn't help but flinch at her expression because I felt bad for her.

'Holy shit… '

I wasn't really interested in Taoist philosophy, but I was nodding just a few minutes ago while thinking that having Kasugano Yuno by my side could be considered karma, and it was the same for Park Deok-Gu. Considering the fact that I was getting harassed by Jung Ha-Yan like this, I started questioning whether I had done something wrong to her, too. I was sure that wasn't the case, but I still couldn't help but think about it.

"*Eeeeeeek!*"

Blood flowed from Jung Ha-Yan's fist and lip as she bit on it. I felt kind of scared to look straight at Jung Ha-Yan because her face was quivering, and before I could even think about how to handle this situation, I suddenly said…

"Nothing happened."

"*Ah*…"

It was bullshit, but my voice sounded so innocent it couldn't be a lie.

CHAPTER 193
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (1)

I felt bad seeing Jung Ha-Yan sniffling behind Kim Hyun-Sung. I obviously felt guilty because I could see her crying even as we were heading back to Lindel while riding our griffons. When she looked back, I was surprised, but I still managed to maintain my serious expression.

'I'm sorry, Ha-Yan.'

It was because I had to show her that I was angry. If I hadn't lied, then I would have been *really* angry because she suddenly barged into Kasugano Yuno's room and injured the members of the Yozora Guild. To make things worse, she used magic inside the castle. She hadn't used a powerful spell, but it had been strong enough to destroy the castle, so I was sure that woke everyone up. The nobles in the area considered it a serious incident that was second only to the Ito Sota incident, and their eyes naturally landed on us.

Some people discussed if the incident would sour the alliance between the Blue Guild and the Yozora Guild. I tried to put an end to this groundless rumor, but it didn't work. I couldn't hide it since it happened within the castle, and it was even more difficult to cover up because of the alliance between the two guilds. If Kasugano Yuno hadn't taken over the Yozora Guild, this incident would have been enough to end the alliance between the Blue Guild and the Yozora Guild.

'Shit… '

Of course, this was a big incident for me, and even though I had to convince Jung Ha-Yan somehow, I couldn't do it because the evidence was so clear for me to use logic to try to convince her. In the end, I chose to be angry with her. Not only did I tell her that nothing happened, but I immediately yelled at her for being rude, which concluded the situation. I was sure there were other ways I could have handled the situation, but I had *truly* been in a panic when Jung Ha-Yan came to Yuno's room, so I hadn't had enough time to think. Despite sleeping with Kasugano Yuno on the same

bed for one night, I had made an excuse that nothing had happened between us. We had been practically naked, but I had made an excuse and said that it was a ritual to perform a spell. My excuses were so ridiculous that it was like saying I drank, but I didn't drink and drive despite being intoxicated in a car. Still, I got goosebumps when I lied straight to her.

'I had been a complete piece of shit.'

It was only for a moment, but I had been a piece of shit who had surpassed the Lee Ki-Young of the Dark World.

What happened after my excuse was even worse, as I drove her into a corner before she became suspicious.

'I'm disappointed… '

It started with that.

'You have no manners.'

And…

'You have to reflect on yourself.'

Using those as excuses, I demanded that she apologize to the Yozora guild members, and she immediately apologized to Kasugano Yuno. Yuno quickly caught on, so when she played along, Jung Ha-Yan immediately became the rebel. Unfortunately, my cold-heartedness at that moment had led to this current situation.

'I'm sorry… Ha-Yan.'

Someone once said that when it came to relationships, the one who liked their partner more was the weaker one. I was able to confirm that this was true through this incident. I immediately locked myself up in my room at the thought that I had to fix Jung Ha-Yan's future unpredictable actions amidst the guilt and embarrassment. I didn't leave my room, and I also didn't meet Jung Ha-Yan. Obviously, I didn't contact Kasugano Yuno at all.

After the ceremony, I rode on my griffon without saying a word, which was why she sat behind Kim Hyun-Sung instead of behind me.

I was being hard on her to prevent this kind of incident from happening again. Kim Hyun-Sung probably thought we were just having a lover's quarrel, but from my point of view, there were many hidden intentions.

'I can't let the same thing happen again.'

I thought my cold-heartedness would calm her down, but in the end, she changed her mind from being suspicious of me into not wanting to be hated by me. Jung Ha-Yan stood in front of my door while I locked myself inside, and even though she disliked Kasugano Yuno, she visited the latter on her own and apologized.

'Wag the dog.'

I was like a living piece of trash that someone had drawn.

There wasn't a single day that Jung Ha-Yan didn't cry. When I looked back again while riding on Whitefall, I saw her wiping her face with one hand. I managed to endure it up until now, but I was at my limit.

"Let's rest for a bit."

The wind muffled my voice, but Kim Hyun-Sung, whose five senses were superb, turned his griffon's head as if he had heard me, and naturally, I landed Whitefall on a nearby cliff. As soon as I got off, there was an awkward silence, and honestly, Kim Hyun-Sung seemed more awkward than me.

'This guy… '

I knew he was pretty dull in situations like this, but I felt bad when I saw him frantically trying to read my expression and Jung Ha-Yan's. I was sure this situation was like a bolt out of the blue to him. If it were a mistake between the party members, he would have somehow tried to mediate it, but as it was a personal issue between Jung Ha-Yan and me, he looked like he didn't know what to do.

'I wasn't really expecting much anyway… '

It was amusing how he was pretending not to look at me.

"Let's have a quick meal and then head out," I suggested.

“Okay… that’s a good idea, Mr Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung agreed.

I noticed Jung Ha-Yan and me becoming further apart.

Anyway, after we took our seats, we started taking out the food we had brought from the castle, and even though Jung Ha-Yan was doing her best to set everything up, she was still crying. It felt like the weight of her tears was making me feel even more guilty. She looked like she didn’t have any appetite, but she was still obediently eating her lunch box. Sometimes, she would hiccup as if she was about to burst into tears, but after seeing my serious face, it seemed like she was trying to suppress it.

“T-The weather is nice,” Kim Hyun-Sung suddenly said.

“Yeah… it is,” I replied.

The weather wasn’t nice, and Kim Hyun-Sung must have been embarrassed after saying that because he didn’t speak again. Meanwhile, Jung Ha-Yan was forcing herself to eat, and since I was the reason why the mood had become like this, it was up to me to fix it. In the end, I had no choice but to hold out an olive branch to Jung Ha-Yan first. To be honest, this wasn’t really necessary because I was the one who had made a mistake and pretended to be angry with her just to get out of jail. When I nonchalantly gave her a piece of my meat, she looked at me as if she was surprised, and tears started rolling down her face again. She must be really happy that I was taking care of her.

“*Heuk… heuk… hiccup…”*

“Here, eat some more,” I said.

“Okay… *heuk…”* Jung Ha-Yan while sobbing.

“Take your time,” I added.

“Okay. *Heuk…* I… I’m… I’m sorry…” she apologized.

“Stop crying,” I ordered.

“I’m sorry… *heuk*…” she apologized once again.

“Your stomach will hurt,” I warned her.

I was really uncomfortable.

'This wasn't what I wanted… '

Recently, I had the feeling that I had done something kind of bad, but I felt like I had reached the peak with the recent incident, so I remained silent.

Jung Ha-Yan and I were maintaining our official position as lovers regardless of my feelings. My feelings for her were kind of a lie, but we had confirmed our feelings for each other, and we were even discreetly petting. Moreover, we sometimes went on dates and whispered sweet nothings to each other. Jung Ha-Yan was aware of this facade.

If a woman were suspicious of her boyfriend spending the night with a different woman, a normal girlfriend would think about going out and finding out the truth. However, I had no choice but to reason with myself that I had to maintain this kind of situation because, first of all, we weren't on Earth, second, there were special circumstances surrounding me, and lastly, Jung Ha-Yan wasn't normal.

'Yeah… I had no choice.'

I didn't even reason with myself during the Ito Sota incident, and the crazy gramps incident when I sent them to their graves.

Despite Jung Ha-Yan and I being in a romantic relationship, there had to be some tension, and I wanted this even more when I remembered the Cursed Shrine incident. Some people might think of me as a piece of trash if I said this, but I had to have absolute superiority in our relationship.

'That's the way… '

Seeing Jung Ha-Yan eating the tear-stained meat while hiccuping was enough to soften my heart, but I had to remind myself that I had to stay on my toes.

After we were done eating, we got on our griffons again. When Jung Ha-Yan was thinking about which griffon to ride on, I reached out my hand, and she happily sat behind me.

"*Heh… hehe.*"

I guess she was feeling better, and I liked this, too.

“Hold on tight, Ha-Yan,” I told her.

“Okay!” she replied.

She sounded more energetic compared to before. I reckoned she must have thought I had somewhat forgiven her.

‘I needed to do some research anyway.’

Before I could decide whether I could continue to endure my uncomfortable relationship with Jung Ha-Yan or not, I suddenly remembered that I had work to do as soon as I returned to Lindel. In this case, making a compromise like this was the right thing to do.

‘The Park Deok-Gu Remodeling Plan.’

And…

‘The career change.’

I would be able to kill two birds with one stone. The research would be kind of difficult, but it had already been confirmed that the results were achievable.

‘But, how?’

It would be through Lindel’s treasure trove of knowledge. I couldn’t research the details because I didn’t have time, but Dialugia was a living sample. She was a fine specimen that could give me all the knowledge about dragons. I was a bit worried about whether I would be able to comprehend Dialugia with the knowledge I currently had or not, but I didn’t think it was going to be a problem. The catalyst itself was legendary-rank, and it was the only way to transform Park Deok-Gu into Captain Lindel.

‘A serum.’

The most realistic plan to strengthen Park Deok-Gu was already being drawn in my head.

After spending some time in the sky, I could finally see the Free City of Lindel. I wanted to rest, but since I was going to be busy, I nodded and decided to immediately start my research. However, I noticed an unfamiliar building; no, it wasn't a building.

"*Huh?*"

The building looked like a cave, and the materials used to build it were…

'Mithril?'

The building looked like it was covered in mithril and metals whose names were unknown to me. They stood out, and I instantly knew they weren't ordinary metals. The large building made up of epic-ranked or higher materials was big enough to fit Dialugia's entire body and more. All of a sudden, I remembered what I had told Dialugia before I left Lindel.

- It'll be customized, so you can build it however you want.

'Idiot! Idiot!'

- You don't have to worry about money.

'That crazy… '

- You can do whatever you want.

"That crazy woman!!!" I screamed.

This was an incident that showed what would happen if someone who had no idea about economics managed your bank account. I had to return as fast as possible and check my safe.

CHAPTER 194
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (2)

"Shit…" I muttered.

I had returned to Lindel, but I couldn't rest. I had no idea if it was coincidental, but our party members were out hunting. I was feeling tense, so I naturally visited Kim Mi-Young. I had to make sure what I had seen was actually true. The almost complete nest was so ridiculous that my jaw dropped.

"Shit!" I yelled.

It hadn't been that long since I left Lindel, and when thinking logically, it was impossible for the guild to be almost done building it. Actually, it wasn't exactly impossible since this place was different from Earth. It would be different if they hired many top-quality workers and if they hired mages or master artisans with skills. However, they would have to spend a lot of money. When looking at the beautiful architecture akin to a piece of art, it seemed like the guild had hired all the available artisans. I was sure they hadn't just hired one or two people because if they had done that, then they wouldn't have been able to complete the central area this fast.

'Shit!!!'

To build the nest, they hired not only epic-ranked and above mages but also blacksmiths and master artisans from different production fields. The cost of labor was going to be sky high, and there would also be additional charges because the land had to be purchased and cleared. The biggest issue was the materials used to make the nest. I couldn't help but question if Lindel actually had *that* much mithril ore. However, if they had imported the ore from other cities and territories, the transportation cost would have definitely been expensive, and they must have used a griffon.

An enormous amount of money was spent just on the materials alone. Even though I

had saved a lot of money, I was sure my entire savings weren't enough to build that kind of nest. I could estimate the cost just by looking at it, and if they had decorated the interior as well, then the cost would be double.

'That crazy woman. She's crazy!'

I was able to momentarily forget Park Deok-Gu and the Kasugano Yuno from the Dark World, because the current situation was worse than theirs.

When I opened the door to the administration office, Kim Mi-Young looked surprised.

"Sub guild master," she spoke up.

Obviously, she looked as if she had something to say about this ridiculous situation. Kim Mi-Young wasn't an idiot, and I knew she wouldn't allow the guild to build a nest with the money we didn't have. As such, this situation must be something she couldn't control.

I immediately started talking, "Miss Kim Mi-Young, that nest…"

"I-I'm sorry, sub guild master…" Kim Mi-Young apologized.

"I need to hear the details," I told her.

"Well, you…"

The story was kind of concise. As soon as Kim Hyun-Sung and I left Lindel, Dialugia immediately commissioned the construction of the nest, and since I had already told Kim Mi-Young that I was going to build a nest, the construction proceeded pretty quickly.

"I didn't really pay attention to the budget at first because you told me about the nest, but…"

"Did the budget keep increasing?" I asked.

"That's right," she replied.

The problem started when Dialugia herself started to interfere on the construction site. She constantly made additional requests as if the nest wasn't to her satisfaction

and insisted that they had to construct it according to how she wanted it, and of course, it hadn't gone the way she wanted. There was a limit to the budget, and I was sure she was using not only my money but the Blue Guild's money as well. When Kim Mi-Young and a few other party members realized something was wrong, they tried to stop Dialugia, but they failed.

"I cut off the funds when I thought I couldn't let this continue, but—" she said.

"…"

"Miss Dialugia started to bring money herself," she continued.

"How?" I asked.

"She visited each guild and borrowed money after giving them her name," she replied.

"I guess you really couldn't stop her," I remarked.

"I couldn't. Strictly speaking, no one in the guild can exercise their authority over Miss Dialugia. Since we couldn't control her physically, all we could do was pressure the other guilds to not issue her a bond," Kim Mi-Young added.

That had been an excellent decision. If she couldn't stop Dialugia from borrowing money, then she could stop the other guilds from lending her money.

"Naturally, this plan didn't work out so smoothly. When the guilds in Lindel stopped lending her money, she immediately realized we were behind this, so she announced to all of Lindel that she was going to sell her leather and scale to the humans," she said.

"Did she manage to sell them?" I asked.

Dialugia wasn't allowed to sell any of her body parts without my permission. It was better to spend money rather than to let the researchers from other guilds obtain hints about her body. When I discovered this, I realized how we ended up in this situation.

"No—to stop her from selling, you had no choice but to let the other guilds lend her money," I concluded.

“That’s right,” Kim Mi-Young acknowledged.

“Please show me the cost,” I requested.

Kim Mi-Young cautiously handed me the documents, and the more I looked at them, the more nauseous I felt. Rather than scolding Kim Mi-Young and the administration team, I realized that I had to compliment them because I noticed them operating the guild with as little money as possible. Kim Mi-Young must have been unable to sleep for a few days because I noticed bags under her eyes, which was the same for the others. These past few days must have been like hell to them.

“Good job, Miss Kim Mi-Young,” I complimented.

“It’s nothing, sub guild master. I just feel really bad,” she said.

I couldn’t blame the guild’s administration team because this situation wasn’t really their fault. I found myself exhausted before I could even start my research. I was at a loss for words because it felt like I had instantly become buried in debt. Of course, we were earning money, as the potions were selling even at this moment, but there were also things we had to spend money on. The black market beneath Castle Rock was still under construction, and the other businesses were still being prepared.

I felt kind of sad to say this, but how could we recover with Dialugia being here? Naturally, I had no choice but to visit her because I had to know the status of the nest.

When I immediately got on Whitefall, I noticed Jung Ha-Yan looking at me. She looked like she wanted to come with me, but she couldn’t because this was a family issue.

“Ha-Yan,” I called her.

“Yes, Oppa…” she mumbled.

“I’m going to start my research tomorrow, so be prepared. I’m sure we’ll spend a few nights together in the lab,” I informed her.

“O-Okay!” she excitedly replied.

This was enough for me to leave Jung Ha-Yan, and when I quickly flew over to the

nest, I saw a massive dragon's nest.

'It looks nice, but… did they also use magic stones?'

There was a dragon's nest inside the city. It was symbolic, and it was big enough to intimidate people. It seemed like they had also used several artifacts, not just magic stones.

When I quietly entered, I saw a very flashy interior. The light orbs embedded into the ceiling were shining brightly, and I saw objects whose purposes were unknown to me. I didn't really know since I wasn't a dragon, but I was sure they were being used for something, and that was when I heard a voice beside me. When I turned my head, I saw Dialugia with her large horns, and she was wearing her usual clothes.

"You came back pretty quickly," she remarked.

"Where's Smartie?" I asked.

"Sleeping, but more than that, there's something I'd like to show you," she replied.

"They made it pretty quickly…" I commented.

I wanted to be mad and scold her, but when I saw Dialugia's smile, I realized that she *really* liked this nest. She looked the happiest since she came here, and I would probably look the same if I were in her shoes because the nest was beautiful, and they had even done the landscaping. There was a pond and trees inside the cave—need I say more? Actually, they were more like a lake and a forest.

"I think human magic is marvelous," Dialugia started.

'Shit… '

"I never thought they could create an environment like this inside the nest. *Hehehe*," she continued.

'She looks really happy… '

Our feelings were totally different.

"I actually wanted to discuss many things with you since we're going to be living

together, but you seemed busy… and Smartie needs a large nest as well," she added.

"I-I wasn't that busy, so you could have discussed it with me…" I stuttered.

"It's fine. I think I acted a bit sensitive last time. There were things I couldn't handle on my own, but when I mentioned your name, they took care of it, and that helped me realize just how high your position was within the world of humans. It's not much, but while building this nest, I was able to see how the humans lived," she explained.

"I see…" I commented.

"I could see how you're able to provide a safe nest. By the way, I'd appreciate it if you could refrain from going out so much… since you have Smartie here. Anyway, thank you for your hard work," she complimented.

Honestly, my lips were trembling because the person in front of me had used up all the money I had saved up until now. It would be strange if I weren't upset, but I could still tolerate it because she was suddenly being friendly even though she had been cold before I left for the capital.

'Dialugia is special.'

Dialugia was starting to realize her worth little by little. She had used up all my money and had put me in debt, but it wasn't a bad trade as long as I managed to win her favor. Even with a little bit of research, I could obtain many things, and money was an additional benefit that would certainly come with it. I would make an enormous amount of money. Dialugia would be a massive help with my job, and she would also be the key to strengthening Park Deok-Gu.

'Smartie's quality of life will increase as well.'

Becoming close to her like this wasn't a bad idea, and thinking about it made me smile.

"Didn't you say there was something you wanted to show me?" I asked.

"Of course. There's a lot you need to know since we built a large nest, and humans don't know anything about dragons," Dialugia replied.

She was absolutely correct, and just by taking a look at the nest, I thought I could get a rough idea of how dragons lived. While walking with her, I noticed a lot of interesting things.

“This is the food storage room,” she said.

“Does it have to be that big?” I asked.

“Dialuria may be eating a little right now, but… in three to five years, she’ll continuously consume nutrients because those nutrients will be transformed into mana,” she answered.

“*Ahhh*…”

“I saw human magic that can prevent food from spoiling, so I think that’ll be really helpful,” she added.

“What about that forest and lake…”

“Dialuria will learn how to hunt in that place,” she answered.

“I see…” I replied, nodding.

Fortunately, she didn’t waste money on useless things. The items that Smartie would be using were high-quality, and I understood why she chose them when thinking about it from a mother’s point of view.

‘It still breaks my heart, though.’

“And this is your room,” she said.

“My room…”

“You’re Dialuria’s father, so you should sleep here. I’m still quite ignorant about how humans live, so I did my best with the little knowledge I had,” Dialugia explained.

‘I can’t stay here that often, though… ’

Still, I decided to thank her for it.

“I appreciate the thought.”

“Actually, there’s one more place I *really* wanted to show you,” she mentioned.

“There is?” I asked.

As we passed the dungeon-like room, I saw a large alchemy lab that was so big Dialugia could lay there in her original form.

‘What—’

“I was told that you really needed it. I honestly don’t like it, but you mentioned that you wanted to know more about my body, and that had been the condition for me to stay here. I don’t know much, but based on human standards, I’m considered high-quality. You can consider this as a gift for providing me with a nest,” she explained.

“A gift…”

It was pretty big, and it felt like she had spent a lot of gold to build this. I did feel upset thinking that money had been spent on this room, but this was a part of my job, anyway. I was sure Dialugia had asked the construction manager to create this. She had probably been ripped off because she had no idea about the prices, but I appreciated the thought. At that moment, a question suddenly popped into my head.

‘Is the budget correct?’

The budget I had calculated in my head and from the documents only involved the cave itself. It wouldn’t be enough to build a room *this* big.

“You don’t have to worry. This is really a present for you,” she said.

“And the gold—”

“*Oh,* I borrowed it from the kind humans,” she answered.

Thankfully, she hadn’t sold any of her body parts.

“I was able to complete this nest thanks to the help of the guild members in Lindel, but their help alone wasn’t enough. I met a kind human willing to lend me money, so I asked for their help,” she added.

For some reason, I had a bad feeling about this.

“Their condition was a bit complicated, but luckily, I managed to meet those conditions…”

“What were their conditions?” I asked.

“Strangely enough, those humans seemed like they only give loans to females. I don’t know the details, but I saw the text, which said *Female Specialized Player Loan.* Since this was a gift, I didn’t think it was right to be indebted to the humans in the guild since you’re affiliated with them, so I signed a contract for the first time in my life. I may not be a player, but they must have trusted me because of you,” Dialugia explained.

“What?” I asked, dumbfounded.

“You don’t have to be so happy. It’s my way of asking you to take good care of Smartie from now on. *Hehe*,” she said, giggling.

“Wait, what did you just say? The thing you said before being indebted…”

“Are you talking about the *Female Specialized Player Loan?* Is this your first time hearing about them?” she asked.

“You… cra… cra…”

“So you have heard of them. Mi… Mi… I can’t remember what they said… *Oh!* A guild named Miju Love lent me the money,” she said.

“You crazy woman!” I screamed.

When she said that, I couldn’t help but scream out the words I had been holding in.

CHAPTER 195
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (3)

"You c-crazy woman!" I screamed.

This continent wasn't exactly kind to women, and it made sense if you thought about it. This didn't apply to women like Cha Hee-Ra, Jung Ha-Yan, and Jo Hye-Jin because they were talented, and it didn't apply to determined women like Lee Ji-Hye either.

However, the majority of the women who had gotten a free ride from the tutorial dungeon were considered weak in society. The men would find it *very* exhausting to fight against monsters, so it was natural that women would also find hunting a tiring activity considering that they were physically weaker than men. They would usually give up even before the battle could start if they weren't mages or priests. Even if they could use a mage or a priest's abilities, they would still end up in the same situation as their less fortunate counterparts if they were without talent. The women who had mustered up the courage to join a hunt would often end up in dangerous situations after joining parties filled with crazy bastards. Moreover, the female players who had to constantly sleep outside, spend a lot of time in the middle of a dungeon control, or were used to a specific hunting style would naturally distance themselves from hunting.

Unaffiliated female players wouldn't be in a party unless they were in a fixed party, as I was sure they wouldn't trust a man they had just met for the first time, especially when they had to spend several days together. This was the reason why the Black Swan guild was mostly composed of female members. However, this meant that this issue was already festering before we even arrived here.

In the end, the women who gave up on living as a player would either get an office job in a guild or live as laborers. However, guilds, clans, and even self-employed businesses wouldn't give them decent wages. The minimum wage was implicitly set, but the problem was that too many people didn't want to enforce it. To avoid this, they created the…

'Female Specialized Player Loan.'

They were legitimate lenders like Miju Love and Garosh, and Cash.

There was a bank in Lindel, and even though they were a bit primitive, the Holy Empire stood behind the Empire Bank, and they offered loans and insurance. Obviously, not just anyone could borrow money from these facilities, and I was sure they were confused that a dragon had come to borrow money instead of a human.

I guess Dialugia still hadn't realized what was going on because she looked dumbfounded when I suddenly screamed. She actually frowned as if asking me what she had done wrong.

"W-What did you say? That's rude. I did it all for you! This is your gift!" Dialugia yelled.

"That's bullshit!" I yelled back.

"Y-You're a really rude person! I can't believe a person like you is Dialuria's father! Are humans not capable of understanding gifts filled with gratitude?" she asked angrily.

"Do you have any idea who's actually the rude one here?! Bring the contract to me right now!" I ordered.

"What?" she asked, dumbfounded.

"I told you to bring me that contract!" I repeated.

When she saw how frustrated I was, Dialugia must have realized that something was wrong because she slowly approached me with a worried expression while holding a pile of documents.

It would have been better if she borrowed from Garosh and Cash. The clan behind them was small, and the clan master, Galoshik, wasn't that powerful. However, Kim Mi-Ju of the Miju Love Guild was a different story. Their guild was small to be considered a large guild, but she was strong and had the influence to protect herself. When comparing sizes, the Miju Love Guild was nothing compared to the Blue Guild because our guild was in an alliance with the Red Mercenary Guild, the Black Swan Guild, and the Yozora guild. However, Dialugia had borrowed money through legal

means, and she had already spent all of it.

I was already getting annoyed when I thought about how I would have to waste my time negotiating with them. I had a lot on my plate, so I didn't have time to worry about them. However, Dialugia had taken the initiative to borrow from them, and if she didn't pay after spending all the money, the other guilds and clans would think badly of us.

"H-Here you go…" she stuttered.

I was suddenly filled with frustration.

"I don't need it!" I screamed.

I couldn't hold my anger in as soon as I received the documents and hurled the documents away. It seemed like Dialugia had no idea what she had done wrong, but based on the atmosphere; she knew she had made a big mistake, so she started to act timid. She didn't look like a dragon that could easily crush me, but I was still angry because it was a huge amount. It must have been Dialugia who visited Miju Love first, as the guild didn't contact her first. As such, this couldn't be excused.

'I spent a lot of money at the underground arena… '

I couldn't ask the Yozora Guild for help, so borrowing money from either the Black Swan Guild or the Red Mercenary Guild was the best option because I just couldn't watch as the interest rate rose.

'I wish I had a table I could throw… '

I felt a really strong urge to throw a table, but I bit my lips for now and suppressed it. I knew I had to be like a gentleman to Dialugia.

"Didn't… Didn't I… tell you not to make contact with humans without thinking, Dialugia?" I asked.

"I still don't—"

"You're not supposed to borrow gold so recklessly like this. I know you're an intellectual race, but based on human standards, you're like a child when it comes to social skills. I understand what you were trying to do, but let's learn little by little.

No, in the first place—"

"*Kyaaah!*"

"…"

"*Kyaaaaah!*"

"*Ooh!* Is our Smartie awake?" I said.

"*Pant, pant! Pant!*"

When I was about to express my anger, Smartie appeared to save their mother. I wasn't sure if my loud voice woke them up, but I was certain Dialugia was thinking that they had appeared at the right time because I couldn't raise my voice in front of Smartie. After all, we had to show Smartie that we were a happy couple. It was cute how Smartie frantically ran toward me, and though it was only for a moment, I felt my anger dissipate. It was to the point that I finally understood what people meant when they said that they lived for their children.

"That's right! Daddy is here! Did you miss me?" I asked.

"*Kyaaaaaah! Kyaaah! Pant! Pant!*"

The way Smartie wagged its tail *really* fast made it seem like a rampaging spell had been placed on it. I guess they must have *really* missed me because they started licking my face. This was natural since we hadn't seen each other for a few days now.

"Yes, Daddy is back from work!" I exclaimed.

"*Kyaaaah!*"

I was sure Smartie couldn't understand what I was saying because they were jumping around so that I would hug them. While hugging Smartie, I looked at Dialugia as if I was dissatisfied with her actions, and she avoided my gaze.

"I can… pay them back…" she muttered.

"How? Keep in mind that you don't have the option to sell parts of your body because your body belongs to me. That was part of the deal," I mentioned.

"*Kyaaah! Pant, pant!*"

"'T-Then I can go hunting and capture monsters…" Dialugia stuttered.

"Capturing one or two monsters won't be enough to pay the full amount, and even if you captured monsters, it'd only cover the interest considering the rate. I'll figure out the gold myself. *Whoo*. Looks like Smartie isn't the only one that needs lessons. You need lessons as well to prevent this from happening again," I explained.

"…"

"There's something I need to check about your body, so please be prepared," I informed her.

I was going to take my time with it, but it would be best to do it as soon as possible, and the laboratory that looked like it had been taken from a picture was already complete, anyway. I was somewhat thankful for what she had done, but I was instantly filled with frustration knowing that I couldn't tell her that.

Even though she didn't tell me, Dialugia looked kind of disappointed, so in the end, I had no choice but to thank her.

"And… thank you for the gift. I'll use it well."

That seemed to have made her feel better.

It was natural for me to want to learn more about Dialugia right after spending time with Smartie. I had been neglecting this for quite a while now, as I had a lot on my plate.

'I actually wanted to rest for a few days… '

My empty bank account broke my heart.

'I'll get that money back, anyway.'

Compared to the money I was going to earn from now on, that money was considered small, and despite knowing that better than anyone, I still couldn't help but feel bitter about it.

Even while spending time with Smartie, I kept thinking about how I should approach Dialugia. She still looked guilty and was watching us from a few steps away. Moreover…

“What should I do?” Dialugia asked.

She was looking at me as if she was ignorant of everything.

“First, I want you to transform into your original form since I haven’t figured out how it works yet,” I replied.

“Okay…”

As soon as she answered, strange things started to appear on her body. The clothes she was wearing were torn apart, but I didn’t have the time to appreciate her body because she was rapidly turning into a dragon. Unique scales started to appear on her arms, and it was amazing to see her human skin shed into dragon skin. I heard her bones and muscles twisting, but she didn’t seem to be in pain. It was like this was as natural as walking.

“*Roaaaaaar…”*

Seeing her instantly grow so big was intimidating, and I couldn’t help but stare at her with my mouth agape. Actually, she looked kind of scary, and I suddenly remembered the moment when I hurled the documents away. I had no idea what she thought of me while she was in her original form, but seeing the dragonized Dialugia up close was really overwhelming.

“*Wow…”*

She had two large horns and teeth that could swallow me with one bite. Above all, as an inferior species, I felt awe looking at a superior species. Seeing her shiny leather and scales made me think that I was *really* standing in front of a dragon.

- Do I look strange?

“Huh?”

- I can only talk to my spouse since it’s impossible for a dragon’s body to speak the human language…

“I understand what you’re saying, and you don’t look strange. I just think you’re simply amazing. You looked scary back then, but looking at you in a calm situation like this is really astounding,” I replied.

‘Even though you spent all of my money… ’

“We’ll start by analyzing your blood. After that, I’ll measure the values and figure out different things. If it hurts, please tell me,” I informed her.

I slowly drew her blood out using the syringe I had specially designed for her. When I began, I immediately heard her voice.

- It tickles. *He… hehe. Hehehe.*

Her laugh was sillier than I had expected.

“Please bear with it just a little more,” I told her.

- *He… hehehehe!*

“If you don’t want to crush me to death, please stay still!” I yelled.

- But…

“All done. Please be more careful. My body is very weak,” I warned her.

- I’ll be more careful.

I knew this research wouldn’t be done in one day, but I had to hurry because I didn’t know how much time I would have to spend on this. I immediately activated Mind’s Eye and moved her blood to the Alchemist Kit. Her blood started to separate little by little, and when it was moved to each flask, it immediately reacted with the catalysts that were there. I wasn’t expecting any result because checking the reaction of the equipment that had been prepared was the first thing I had to do, and I was doing just that. Naturally, I then extracted the cells and performed a genetic search. I thought it would be best to return it to the apparatus first because it would take some time to calculate with the equipment and mana I had.

‘Where do I start?’

[Discovered Legendary-Ranked Catalyst _____ for the first time.]

[Intelligence has increased by 1 point.]

[Discovered Legendary-Ranked Catalyst _____ for the first time.]

[Intelligence has increased by 1 point.]

[Discovered Legendary-Ranked Catalyst _____ for the first time.]

[Intelligence has increased by 1 point.]

[Please enter the name of the catalyst.]

[Obtained a new title.]

[Pioneer]

[This is a title for players who have discovered materials that did not previously exist on this continent. Intelligence has increased by 1 point.]

[Alchemist Who Experimented on Dragons]

[This is a title for the first player to experiment on a living dragon on this continent. Intelligence has increased by 1 point.]

[I am in awe of your endless quest for alchemy, the truth, and your adventurous spirit.]

[Discovered a new legendary-ranked job.]

[Dragon Alchemist - Unique Legendary Rank]

“I love you, honey!” I screamed.

I had already forgotten that she had used up all my money.

CHAPTER 196
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (4)

I had expected some kind of result because Dialugia was a legendary-ranked monster, a member of the dragon race, and her body was full of mysteries. However, I had never imagined I would get a present *this* big.

[Dragon Alchemist - Unique Legendary Rank]

'A unique legendary!'

I was happy when I had obtained an epic-ranked job, but the visual effect when I changed into this legendary-ranked job was different compared to when my body glowed purple as a result of changing into an epic-ranked job.

"*Wow…*"

The golden light bursting all over my body signaled a change into a legendary-ranked job, and it was something I had only heard about. I felt like I had an amazing person, so I couldn't stop smiling as the golden light continued to radiate from my body.

'A legendary rank!'

When my eyes started to hurt a bit, the light started to disappear, but the feeling was still there.

"*Pfftt… Hahahaha*."

I looked clumsy, but I couldn't stop laughing, and it would be strange if I weren't happy. I knew that having at least one legendary was a big deal on this continent.

Juliena was doing her job well despite being unawakened, Mind's Eye had become a legendary-ranked attribute, and now, I had a legendary-ranked job. I even wanted to ask the system that had been looking down on me all this time about who was the boss now. It was common knowledge that a legendary-ranked job could only open on the fifth or sixth job change, so when I considered that, I realized that my growth rate was pretty fast to the point that not having any talent had become irrelevant.

'My stats are still trash, though… '

It wasn't just a legendary-ranked job. It was a *unique* legendary-ranked job. This meant I was the only person on the entire continent who could have this job.

[Dragon Alchemist - Unique Legendary Rank]

[It's a new type of job that hasn't been discovered before. Despite the continent's rich history, there hasn't been an alchemist who practiced or even tried using a living dragon as a catalyst. To commemorate the achievement, I have decided to make the Dragon Alchemist a Unique Legendary-ranked job. Every alchemist is amazed by your great achievement. The Dragon Alchemist is the only alchemist who can use a dragon as a catalyst. The possibilities depend on your research and alchemy skills. Your intelligence will increase by six points, and your magic will increase by seven points. Your understanding of dragons will increase as well. The effects of your previous job, Bio Alchemy Summoner, will remain. Some of the species created by the job effect of the Unique Legendary-ranked Dragon Alchemist will remain as summons.]

'Nice!!!'

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young's Status Window and Stats.]

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - Mercenary Queen's Lover, Benigoa Holy Empire's Honorary Bishop, Pioneer, Alchemist Who Experimented on Dragons]

[Age - 25]

[Nature - Cautious Strategist]

[Job - Dragon Alchemist - Unique Legendary Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired special summoning knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced alchemy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired Dragon Expert Alchemy knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 21/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 22/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 30/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 87/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 22/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 65/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 45/Below average growth limit]

[Gear]

[Juliena, the Cursed Sword - Legendary Rank - Sense of Ownership]

[Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy - Epic Rank - Alchemist Exclusive]

[Magic Shield Ring - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - Mind's Eye - Legendary Rank]

[Overall Review - It's a pity to see you working hard to raise your magic stats because it won't increase on its own. I had never imagined you would reach 45 magic points, but I would like to applaud you for that. Even though your other stats are still garbage, I want to commend you for almost reaching 90 points in intelligence and for obtaining a Unique Legendary-ranked job. I am looking forward for more in the future, but… don't be too proud. Your stats, excluding intelligence, magic, and luck, haven't increased at all.]

'I'm an alchemist anyway, so why does that matter?'

Actually, it *did* matter. Strength, agility, and endurance might not matter all that much, but stamina *did* matter. However, it wasn't to the point that I regretted it. Who would have thought I would obtain 45 points in magic?

'This… is the magic of someone that has 45 points!'

My stat was pretty depressing compared to other mages, but I couldn't help but laugh at the enormous amount of mana within me. Obviously, it was only enormous by *my* standards. When I released a small amount of mana into my hand and lightly grabbed the hard-looking catalyst in my pocket…

'Shit… '

It didn't break. When I placed the catalyst down and grabbed a different one, I heard a crack and saw it break.

'I'm like the Hulk!'

Now that my magic stat was in the 40s, I was able to do the things I couldn't do when it had been in the 30s. I could temporarily strengthen my body with mana, but that wasn't the only thing that made me happy. Recently, my intelligence stat hadn't been increasing, but it increased by a lot just now. I had heard from Hwang Jung-Yeon that another attribute would open when one's intelligence stat reached 90 points, and it had been a piece of cake for me to increase my intelligence stats by 3 points while

researching. There had to be a limit when increasing from 89 points to 90 points, but it wasn't a problem right now. I had recently gotten my fourth job, and I still had to unlock my fifth job. It was difficult to believe that this was the growth rate of a person who had only been here for a year because the people who had come with me had to be on their second job, or they had just unlocked their third job.

My decision to take full control of Kim Hyun-Sung's party was working out perfectly. I had greatly benefited from Dialugia, and I shared the happy moment with her. While I continued thinking about the stats I had just obtained, Dialugia spoke while looking at me as though I was pathetic.

- Did you gain something?

"I told you I had obtained something great thanks to you. I love you, honey. Yes, I do!" I exclaimed.

Dialugia's rank was directly promoted from crazy woman to lovely wife. Since I couldn't express this happiness with just words, I ran to her large face, stuck to her skin, and kept on kissing her.

- That's disgusting. Please stop.

"There's nothing wrong with us kissing!" I told her, exclaiming.

- Anyway, I told you to stop. This kind of affection is uncomfortable and unpleasant. If you have time to do this, please finish the experiment quickly and focus more on our dear Dialuria. As expected from humans…

"My lovely darling! How could I have not known about this charming side of yours? Your shiny leather and sharp horns! Everything about you is pretty!" I complimented her.

- For some reason, your compliment sounds like an insult.

"*Hehehe!*"

- I told you to stop sticking so close to me so creepily. Stay back. If not, I'll move.

"You're so cute… If you move, you'll crush me to death, darling," I reminded her.

- T-This human…

Honestly, I was *really* excited. I was happy when I obtained the epic-ranked job Bio Alchemy Summoner, but this feeling was different from back then. Since no one else was here to watch me, I thought it wouldn't be bad to express my happiness. Dialugia seemed annoyed at first, but she must've given up after a few minutes because she sighed quietly. The wind created by her sigh staggered me, but I still couldn't hide my happiness. And that was when Dialugia spoke again.

- So… what did you obtain?

"*Ahem…*"

- Please tell me. Is there something you're trying to hide from me?

"It's nothing. I was just trying to calm myself. I had just realized that your body is worth more than I thought," I replied.

- It was all greed in the end.

"That's not the case; actually, you're not completely wrong…" I corrected.

-…

"…"

- Please tell me.

"Of course. The humans living on this continent obtain jobs that are different from yours. I'm not sure if you can obtain jobs while being in your human form, but that's how humans are—*Oh!* This information might be too complicated, so I'll just skip it because that's not what's important right now. I told you last time that I was an alchemist," I started.

- I remember…

"An alchemist is an occupation given to those who seek the truth. Although it's a job derived from mages, it's undeniable that the two pursue different things," I continued.

- It doesn't really fit you.

"I partially agree with you. Anyway, if I were to give you the bigger picture, the genes and blood from your body are undiscovered materials on this continent. It's difficult to use it as a catalyst right now, so I'll have to refine it first; however, it's undeniable that I was the first one to discover them. Basically, these three materials are items that have never existed before in this world," I added.

- Isn't that my blood? It existed before, so it's not a substance that has never existed in this world.

"I can't say that the blood completely belongs to you, as I was the one who succeeded in refining and catalyzing it. It's a synthetic catalyst made up of several catalysts that'll help it run smoothly, but it doesn't change the fact that the main ingredient is yours. I did this experiment just to see the chemical reaction, but I didn't expect to hit the jackpot. Of course, I did some calculations prior to doing this, but… even I didn't expect this kind of result," I explained.

Out of hundreds of flasks, only three didn't break. It might not seem like a big achievement, but it was undeniable that I had hit the jackpot during the first experiment. Just looking at the glowing legendary-ranked catalyst was enough to excite me. I was amused when I saw Dialugia looking at them quietly with her large eyes.

- What's its name?

"It doesn't have a name. As I mentioned, they're catalysts discovered for the first time. Since there happens to be three, I think we can name it after ourselves and Smartie," I replied.

- *Oh*…

Dialugia seemed happy as she blinked once.

"It all happened without precise calculation, so I'll need to verify what kind of effects they have and how I got this result, but the process of organizing them isn't that difficult," I explained.

- So, I was helpful…

“Of course, and that’s not the only thing I obtained. I mentioned earlier that humans could obtain jobs through special actions,” I started.

- You did.

“Before I discovered these three catalysts and checked the details of your body, I obtained a job. It’s a high-ranked job, and I guess it’s best to say that it’s a job where I specialize in studying the dragon race. Basically, I can understand you better now,” I said.

- Does that mean you have obtained a special power?

“Yes, you can think of it that way. I’ll need to do more research since it’s still in the early stages…” I replied.

- *Oh*…

“I’ll be able to do a lot of things once I complete my research, like putting your breath into this small flask,” I told her.

- Breath?

“I probably can’t expect the same amount of power, but it’ll end up that way,” I added.

- That’s impossible. Think about it logically, and it’s impossible to put my Breath into that small glass bottle.

“Whether it’s impossible or not will depend on my research, but I believe it’s possible,” I said.

- I’m sure it’s impossible.

“I’m sure it’s possible because I had even obtained these. The third job I had obtained was Bio Alchemy Summoner. If I considered the effect of that job and the effect of the Dragon Alchemist…”

The moment I grabbed the catalyst made from Dialugia’s cells, the catalyst turned into mana, and I felt it flowing around me. Back then, I had to manually activate the catalyst, but the dragon’s catalyst didn’t have a complicated process like that. With one catalyst, anything was possible, as that was a job effect of this Unique

Legendary-ranked job.

A strange energy coursed through my hand as crackling sounds reverberated. Dialugia must have been curious about what I was doing, and I was also curious about what kind of result this was going to bring. With the strange energy in my hand, I made a seal, and the moment I touched the ground, a large dragon's hand began forming from the ground a short distance away.

- *Uh*…

"This is… really nice…" I remarked.

- There's no way… Y-You…

Dialugia looked like she couldn't understand what was going on. Obviously, she wasn't the only one with that confused expression. I was also confused by the result I had made.

- Did you become a god or something? What you did just now! Logically!

"Obviously, that's not a creature, and I can't expect it to have destructive powers right now. I also can't create real dragons. I don't think this is a field where experiments can determine whether this is possible or not because creating a homunculus in the shape of a human alone is very expensive and time-consuming. If that were possible, as you said, I would become closer to being a god, not a human. I can't create complicated and noble creatures like you. When it comes to inferior creatures, however…"

- Is it possible?

"It's impossible…" I replied.

- I see…

"For now," I added.

I could hear the dragon gulp.

Cloning Dialugia was impossible, but mass-producing clones of drake races might be possible. I also thought of potential ideas similar to the Breath potion. I had a lot to

think about, including my final goal for this research and the methods to strengthen Park Deok-Gu.

'It might actually be possible.'

I might actually be able to create a Captain Lindel who could throw a shield with the Blue Guild's crest engraved on it.

CHAPTER 197
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (5)

It had been a while since I was filled with enthusiasm, so I officially started my research. Gathering data about Dialugia was a priority, so I continued scanning her with Mind's Eye while I contemplated if I was missing something all day. Before, I told her she had to lie down, but I had no choice but to ask her to move around now. It was because I had to study her athletic ability and how much of her mana she could use. I didn't know how strong her Breath was, but I was able to obtain some data based on her magic ability and testimony.

'One city?'

She testified that she could blow away a small city. It wasn't strange at all because her magic stat was 125, and she had advanced magic knowledge that only the top players possessed. Obviously, I couldn't find any records with Mind's Eye that she possessed advanced magic knowledge, but there was evidence that she had something similar. If she didn't have advanced magic knowledge, then she wouldn't be able to use various Breaths. She had two types of Breaths, and I categorized the two like this…

1. A radial form with enough power to destroy a city.

2. A concentrated form for those with high magic resistance, or those she had a difficult time handling with her powers alone.

The radial form of Breath was created to handle many enemies rather than a single enemy. It had a massive range, but it wasn't as effective against people like Cha Hee-Ra or humans with high magic resistance, and that was why the concentrated form of Breath was created. The range of the concentrated form was smaller, but it was superior in everything else because it consumed a lot of mana. It was difficult to

gauge the exact values, but it was strong enough to break through the shield of an archmage who had unlocked their sixth job. Of course, the concentrated form's projectile speed was much faster, so even people with high agility couldn't really dodge it.

Breath wasn't the only area I focused on. I immediately extracted data on her agility and strength stat to see how strong she was and stored other data about her in my head. There was a small margin of error, and I was going to do more precise measurements later because I had to run right now.

'I shouldn't just focus on one side… '

Focusing on just one side wouldn't be as productive because she was big, voluminous, and she carried a massive amount of knowledge. It was rare to spend so much time studying just the specifications, and honestly, I couldn't even do it alone. I assumed that Dialugia wouldn't be able to fly, but I was kind of surprised she was able to fly using her mana. The massive mana consumption meant she rarely flew, but the important part was that she could fly.

'She's definitely a dragon.'

I had no choice but to give Dialugia a better assessment, and obviously, I wasn't just focused on calculating her stats. Categorizing and extracting data like this was the basics, and it had to be done so that my future research would smoothly proceed. Usually, I would wait for the data to pile up, but Dialugia was a living being.

The blood and cells I had extracted from her were almost infinite. Basically, after extracting a few liters of blood from her, her body would restore it within a few hours, so there wasn't a reason for me to slow down my research while worrying about money and materials. As long as I excluded elements that could threaten my safety…

'I'm going for it.'

It didn't matter if the experiment was somewhat dangerous because I was still going to do it. No matter which path I took, they all led to the same destination, and the facility I was in was so big that I could lay out all of my equipment without worrying about money. The various alchemist kits sitting in this large space operated without stopping. Various materials were constantly getting refined and the magic circle's

fire never went out. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan was the one supplying mana to the magic circle.

Everything about Dialugia was top secret and Jung Ha-Yan was the only one allowed to enter the lab. I thought it would be better to call for Park Deok-Gu's girl, Hwang Jung-Yeon, the mage scholar, but I had decided Jung Ha-Yan was the only person I could fully trust, so I didn't bother calling for her.

Dialugia was my greatest treasure. I guess you could call me greedy for not wanting to share data about her to the people I was close to and was part of the same guild. It was to the point that I repeatedly mumbled "My precious," while staring at her.

Excluding the accidental jackpot I had experienced on the first day of the experiment, I hadn't obtained anything else, but I wasn't feeling anxious. It was all because I was certain there was going to be an improvement. The vast amount of data and the continuously running alchemist kits were similar to a fully-automated laboratory.

Dialugia was looking at us because she didn't know what was going on, but she would sometimes fall asleep, and she probably thought lying down could be considered *resting.* When there was no progress on the outside, I naturally became interested in the inside of her body. I had no intention of dissecting my lovely Dialugia, so I started off by scanning her entire body and performing various experiments all at once. Out of all the experiments, the most memorable one was when I entered her body. It might sound crazy, but Jung Ha-Yan and I actually entered through her mouth and explored the inside of her body. With Jung Ha-Yan's help, I was able to explore not only Dialugia's esophagus and stomach, but her other organs as well.

- Is this really necessary?

"This is all for the development of the great alchemy, and it's also for you," I replied.

- I don't even know what my body is like.

"If you think it's getting dangerous, we'll come out immediately, so you don't have to worry," I assured her.

- It's not because I think you're dangerous. I-I'm just embarrassed.

"…"

-…

Surprisingly, it was the first experiment that made Dialugia feel uncomfortable. She said that the experiment made her feel naked, but she wasn't wearing clothes in the first place, so I couldn't help but chuckle because I had never imagined she would say something like that.

Thankfully, Jung Ha-Yan and I hadn't experienced a heartbreaking situation like us dissolving in gastric acid because dragons didn't digest their food. Instead, they broke it down into mana. However, Jung Ha-Yan and I could have been broken down into mana as well.

Unbeknownst to her, Dialugia's organs had almost started to break us down into mana, but Jung Ha-Yan's protective magic saved me.

Our first body expedition ended there, and after creating our own special equipment, we went in again, and we were able to look around more safely. I discovered an interesting fact while exploring her body: the structure of her organs was more complex than a human's organs. This didn't really come as a surprise because she was a member of a race considered to be high-ranked.

The fact that she digested food by breaking them down into mana was surprising. I did find it fascinating that the amount of food Smartie had been eating was greater than their body size, but who knew their organs looked like that? Like a trope found in fantasy novels, the summoned mana was sent to their heart, and from their heart, the mana would flow throughout their body along with their blood.

'So, that's it… '

So, that was the reason why her mana-filled blood could be used as a catalyst. There was a reason why people wanted a dragon's heart. Dialugia's other organs were also interesting; in some ways, her body was like a large power plant. The food she ate would be broken down into mana, and that mana would circulate throughout her entire body. Her body didn't discharge unrefined and contaminated mana. Instead, they would go through a purification process before they could be used as mana. The secret to all the energy going into her actions was in her mana.

I could only nod after seeing everything about Dialugia, but Jung Ha-Yan seemed

fascinated by how Dialugia's body was moving, so she started to analyze her own data. There were things Jung Ha-Yan could learn as well, and in the end, she became enveloped by a golden light while inside Dialugia. She had awakened a legendary-ranked attribute.

[The Heart of an Archmage - Legendary Rank]

It was ridiculous.

"What kind of attribute is it? Actually, how—"

"I created an additional organ with mana," Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"What?" I asked, dumbfounded.

"I thought it would be good if I had one too, so… I tried it…" she muttered.

"…"

"And I think it worked, Oppa. *Hehehe*…" she giggled.

"I see… Good job, Ha-Yan," I complimented her.

"*Hehehe*…"

She didn't have to explain the details because I already knew about it as I kept on watching her. I knew she was a genius, but this was so ridiculous that I started to panic. Even though she couldn't break down everything into mana like Dialugia could, I was sure she was constantly recycling the mana within her body. In addition to creating something akin to a charger that could quickly recharge the mana in her body, she could also continuously refine and accumulate the remaining mana in her body after using her magic. Her magic stat hadn't increased, but she had created a system that would continuously circulate and recharge her mana.

I had been imagining to myself that maybe, I was starting to close the gap between us, but this was a wake-up call for me as to why a genius was called a genius in the first place. Naturally, Jung Ha-Yan's awakening provoked me a lot, and even though I

didn’t feel inferior to her, I still felt that it was unfair. I wanted to obtain one more thing on top of the Unique Legendary-ranked job, Dragon Alchemist.

As I was continuing my research on the serum that could help strengthen Park Deok-Gu, I had made a theoretical approach during my spare time about how Dialugia was able to shoot her Breath. Breath was a skill that transferred mana stored in a dragon’s heart to a special organ in the neck, and from there, it would then be immediately released.

It was true that collecting samples from an important internal organ would put Dialugia at risk because if I did something wrong and she became unable to use Breath anymore, it would be a massive problem. That was why I chose to create a small model of her organs. After scanning all of her organs using Mind’s Eye, I tried to figure out how her organs worked. Hundreds of experiments became useless, but I kept obtaining hints, which eventually led to the creation of a small bottle with the exact same shape as the main organ that allowed Dialugia to use Breath. The deformed glass bottle had already been processed using magic, and a small magic circle was engraved on it several times for amplification, diffusion, and control.

At the very end of the potion was a magical catalyst made out of Dialugia’s blood. If I added my mana into it, Dialugia’s blood inside it would drip into the small glass bottle.

Whiiiiiirl!

Her blood entered through the mouth of the deformed glass bottle and then activated the magic circle as it spun violently like a motor. It took about two seconds to get to this point. In the end, this small glass bottle would create a wave of mana that would release the mana in the blood in all directions. That was how dragons used Breath.

The glass bottle shattered because it couldn’t withstand the mana. The bottle directly exploded, and even though it wasn't the radial or concentrated form of Breath that Dialugia could use, it was enough for the firepower I wanted.

[Discovered Legendary-Ranked Potion _____ for the first time.]

[Intelligence has increased by 1 point.]

[Please enter the name of the potion.]

[Entering the name of the potion…]

[Dragon Breath Potion - Legendary Rank]

Booooooooooom!

“The explosion was amazing!!!”

Dragon Breath Potion MK1. This was the moment when the first battle-type potion appeared on this continent.

CHAPTER 198
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (6)

[Dragon Breath Potion - Legendary Rank]

[A legendary-ranked potion made by Lee Ki-Young, the Dragon Alchemist. Infuse mana, and two seconds later, Dialugia's magic will release in all directions, creating an explosion with a shockwave.]

The strange-looking glass bottle I was holding looked nicer than I thought and even the deformed shape made it look even more special. Naturally, I was in a really good mood because it was a tool that could make up for my lack of power, and it could also be used to protect myself. However, the two-second activation time was a huge penalty. The penalty made it feel like it wasn't suitable to use against other players, but despite that, I was undeniably happy. Having another option besides magic was an advantage for me.

My stats were lacking for me to deserve one of the Eight Seats, but if I continued to improve this potion, then my arsenal might just make me as strong as an archmage. When I gently held the dazzling potion in my arms and cleaned it, I heard a voice. It was Dialugia who had returned to her human form.

"It's amazing. I never… I never imagined you'd actually make one…"

She was really surprised when she first saw it, but I guess it was more interesting seeing it up close. I couldn't help but smile because the fact that she was surprised meant my potion was a success.

'This is the power of alchemy.'

"Didn't I tell you? This is the product of science, magic, and alchemy. Of course, I still need to make a lot of improvements, and even though it's still in its early stages, I'm going to keep making improvements," I said.

“I don’t understand… I don’t understand how this is possible. But, it’s not that powerful…” Dialugia remarked.

“I thought this wasn’t that bad… *ahem*. Anyway, the principle is simple because I modeled it after your organs. Some of your cells are mixed in this glass bottle. It’s not perfect, but it’s safe to say that this is a deteriorated version of your organs. The only difference is that the size was scaled down a lot, and what’s flowing through this organ is purified blood, not mana,” I explained.

“…”

“Honestly, I don’t even know how this organ is able to release magic waves, but that’s not what’s important. The important thing is that the organs inside you are able to release magic waves and that I can copy it,” I added.

“Is that possible?” Dialugia asked.

“Basically, there’s mana within your blood, and I’m going to drop a dose of blood into this glass model just like how you send mana into your organs. After that, the engraved magic circle will guide the blood into creating energy that will activate this organ. Activating it takes two seconds…” I explained.

“I see,” she mumbled.

“Also…”

Whiiiiiirl!

Booooooooooom!!

When I threw the potion with all my might, I saw it create a large magic wave. I wasn’t sure if Dialugia’s mana had influenced it, but it looked pretty legit when it exploded in black. It wouldn’t have looked as cool if it exploded like a normal glass bottle would. When thinking about the cost of that glass bottle, it was a bit unfortunate that it broke, but it didn’t really matter since it was a test item.

“No matter how many times I look at it, it’s really interesting,” Dialugia commented.

“I agree. Anyway, you don’t have to participate in the experiment for the time being. I have already gathered the data I needed, so the rest is up to me,” I told her.

“Didn’t you already succeed in creating what you wanted?” she asked.

“I’m almost at the final stages. Actually, it’s safe to say that it’s almost complete, but… with my current stats, I don’t have the confidence to create something better,” I answered.

The serum that would turn Park Deok-Gu into Captain Lindel was almost done. It had been difficult to create two items at once, but Jung Ha-Yan, who was playing with Smartie right now, had been really helpful because I also had to dabble in magic to increase the success rate. The potion was already complete, but I questioned whether it was fine to leave the potion as it was. However, there wasn’t much I could do regarding the limitation my stats had placed on me—improving the potion to this extent was my limit.

[Enhancement Serum - Legendary Rank]

[A legendary-ranked potion made by Lee Ki-Young, the Dragon Alchemist. Created after turning Dialugia’s blood into a catalyst, this potion forcefully increases the user’s physical abilities permanently. Only players with stamina and endurance points above 70 can use it. The success rate isn’t high. Failure can result in death, so please use with caution.]

This green liquid looked ominous, and it was simmering violently even though there was no heat. It required the user’s stamina to be above 70 points because there were risks involved in using it. I made the serum, but injecting this into Park Deok-Gu still wouldn’t be safe. The human body would reject the dragon’s scale, and to overcome that rejection, the user’s stamina and endurance had to be at least 70 points. Of course, the surgeon’s will and the help of magic would increase the success rate, but the highest success rate was still under sixty-two percent.

People may ask if it couldn’t be used on people like Kim Hyun-Sung or Cha Hee-Ra, but that wasn’t the case. This potion was useless to people on their level, and I wasn’t dumb enough to inject Captain Lindel’s serum into the Hulk or Thor. Basically, this was custom-made and was modified for Park Deok-Gu’s body. However, the enhancement procedure itself was risky, so the success rate remained under sixty-two percent.

“It’s definitely… dangerous,” I said.

“Do you think so?” Dialugia asked.

“Yes. Other monsters reject our blood as well. Doing this kind of work with another race in the first place is a pretty dangerous idea,” I replied.

“*Ugh… ’*

“If it fails, the user’s body may explode…” I added.

I didn’t really want to see Park Deok-Gu’s body getting blown up because when I visited him to collect data about his body, he was still swinging his sword. In some ways, what I was doing was no different from creating a chimera, and considering the fact that all chimeras had some kind of side-effect, I didn’t really want to recommend it. However…

‘I have a feeling it’ll work… ’

For some reason, I was confident, but this was different from me being overconfident in my abilities. To be precise, I had a feeling that the success rate of this experiment was going to be *very* high because of a transcendent being.

‘That being doesn’t want Park Deok-Gu to die.’

It could just be my imagination, but that was how I felt, and considering the fact that they meddled with my Mind’s Eye, it was possible that they would meddle with this experiment as well.

‘I can keep increasing the success rate.’

Park Deok-Gu himself may agree to do this. No matter how hard I thought about this, it would still be up to him to decide whether he would do this or not. Considering that he could get kicked out of Kim Hyun-Sung’s party, it was probably best to call him here and officially evaluate the different circumstances with him.

‘I’ll do that.’

I wanted to surprise him, but it was difficult to increase the success rate without a test subject, so it was the right decision for him to participate.

“Ha-Yan,” I called out.

“Yes, Oppa?” she answered.

“Can you bring Deok-Gu here?” I asked.

“Okay!”

Jung Ha-Yan ran out after hearing my request, and Dialugia looked at me strangely.

“Are you really doing it?” she asked.

“I have to do it until I can improve the serum. Since I had customized it for him, I’m sure I can increase the success rate just a little bit if he’s here,” I replied.

“How—”

“First, I need to see how his blood will reject the serum, and then I’ll create another potion that’ll counterbalance the effect of the Enhancement Serum. Injecting *that* potion first before the serum should increase the success rate. I have to thoroughly examine him as well,” I answered, interrupting her.

“It’s difficult to understand exactly what you’re saying, but… I think I get it,” she mumbled.

“It’s kind of sad that I can’t do a clinical trial, but anyway, I’m planning on approaching this more cautiously,” I told her.

“*Hmm*… can I help you with anything?” Dialugia asked.

“I may need your help. Injecting your mana into him should decrease the effects of his blood rejecting the serum,” I answered.

I continued talking to Dialugia, and I was surprised that she seemed interested in alchemy.

‘Maybe I’ll make her train with the rookies that are going to join soon.’

However, that useless thought only lasted for a moment. Even though Park Deok-Gu was having problems, helping Dialugia obtain social skills was another task I had to

figure out. In conclusion, I *did* get this laboratory, but I didn't want to have another dumb experience like what happened with Dialugia borrowing money to build the nest. If it weren't for Lee Ji-Hye's help, I would have fully experienced the terror of the loan industry.

After spending some time with Dialugia, I started hearing Jung Ha-Yan's voice. I guess she was talking with Park Deok-Gu because she was pretty loud. Naturally, I started fidgeting with the Enhancement Serum because I had prepared it as a gift.

'It's not a surprise anymore, but I should at least show him this.'

I understood better than anyone how he felt, knowing that he was talentless, so I was excited to see how he would react once he saw this serum because he was desperate.

When I turned my attention to where their voices were coming from, I saw Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan. Before I could greet him, he waved and spoke first. He sounded happy because it had been a while since we had seen each other.

"Hyung-nim!"

"Deok-Gu."

"How have you been? Doing experiments is fine, but you should show your face around the guild some time. The administrative team at the guild is a mess right now. I guess they have a lot of preparation to do related to the tutorial dungeon," Park Deok-Gu said.

"There's something I had to make, so I've been busy recently," I informed him.

"I heard it from Ha-Yan noonim. I heard you made something incredible…"

He smiled as if he was in a good mood, and seeing the sweat on his face showed that he had been training right before coming here. Based on what he said, I was worried that Jung Ha-Yan had told him about the serum, but I immediately realized he was talking about the Dragon Breath Potion because he started talking once again.

"Didn't you call me here because you wanted to show me the Dragon Breath potion or something? *Kgh*… I knew you were going to show it to me first! Ha-Yan noonim has already been spreading rumors to everyone in the guild."

"*Haha*. I actually made something new besides that," I told him.

"Really?" he asked.

"That's right," I answered.

Naturally, my heart started pounding. Seeing him running toward me with that innocent look on his face made me think that he wasn't expecting a present from me. When I quietly showed him the Enhancement Serum, he looked like he wanted an explanation amidst his surprise.

"Read it," I suggested.

"This?" he asked.

His face was quickly filled with excitement when he checked the potion through his status window. He looked like he was curious, and since I was sure that I had partially won him over, I explained…

"I still need to make improvements, but I have custom-made it for you, so I don't think there'll be much of a problem. From now on, I think it'll be best if you spend your time here," I suggested.

"*Oh*…"

"There are a few problems, so I can't inject it right now… and I need to evaluate the different circumstances. *Oh*, don't worry about the penalty too much. The max success rate will be above eighty percent, and the reason why I called you here…"

"Did you call me here for this?" he asked.

"Yeah. You seemed like you've been going through a lot lately," I replied.

"…"

"What's wrong?" I asked.

His reaction was slightly different from what I had imagined. When I questioned if there was something he was dissatisfied with, I felt Park Deok-Gu slowly pushing my hand away.

“I don’t want it, hyung-nim,” he said.

“What?” I asked.

“I told you, I’m not going to accept it,” he repeated.

‘This pig… ’

For the first time, I saw the pig glaring at me.

CHAPTER 199
DRAGON'S NEST, EXPERIMENT, CHANGE, ENHANCE (7)

Park Deok-Gu's reaction was totally different from what I had imagined. I thought he would run over to me excitedly, but I felt a sense of frustration from him that I couldn't understand. Naturally, I felt disappointed because I had spent a lot of time creating this Enhancement Serum. It was an item I had to research anyway, but I had made it especially for Park Deok-Gu.

'This pig… '

I couldn't understand why he was declining it, but I had an idea. It was a pretty insignificant reason, though. It was probably something like he wanted to get stronger on his own, or that he didn't want to borrow the power of this potion to become stronger.

'This bastard… '

I thought that maybe he wasn't desperate enough because if he had an idea about the situation he was in, he would have never said something like that. The only reason he was able to get this far was because he had received help from others. His close-minded thinking was ridiculous. If Park Deok-Gu were in a mid-sized guild instead of the Blue Guild, then I was sure he would have accepted this serum right away. If this serum was sold to the public, I was pretty sure it was going to sell like hotcakes. I didn't want to be the one to say this, but this serum was like an elixir to people like him.

I started glaring at him because I felt like he had betrayed me. I wasn't angry, but I did feel kind of upset.

"What?" I asked.

"I appreciate the thought, but I'm not going to take this. Is this really the reason why you called me here?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yeah, this is the reason,” I replied.

“I’m thankful that you are being considerate of me, but you don’t have to worry about me. I’m not a kid, and I’ll be fine without this,” he explained.

He looked really uncomfortable. This was the first time he looked at me like that since the first time we met. I felt like I had done something I shouldn’t have, but maybe it was just an inferiority complex. He had been working hard and had been moving forward on his own, so being offered a serum like this might make him think that I was pitying him. I was sure there were various reasons, but from my point of view, I had no choice but to pressure him.

“Your stubbornness is unnecessary.”

“I’m not being stubborn,” he argued.

“You should think about the fact that this isn’t just for you, but for the party as well,” I added.

“Stop sugarcoating it. You just need a stronger vanguard.” He pointed out.

I could neither acknowledge nor deny it.

“Then just get someone else because I’m not going to accept it,” he added.

“You!” I yelled.

“I told you I’m not going to accept it!” Park Deok-Gu screamed.

I grabbed one of his hands when he was about to turn around, but Park Deok-Gu angrily pushed my hand away. My stats had increased by a lot, but my frail body was still pushed back. He looked surprised at that moment; he had realized his mistake, but my body was still staggering over to a nearby desk.

‘Shi—’

I wasn’t sure if it was a good thing or a bad thing, but I was able to protect the serum in my arms as my body rolled on the ground. I felt a small shock on my back and after checking the condition of the serum, I looked over at him.

“You! Crazy pig…!”

I was about to unknowingly yell at him in fury, but then I felt a large flow of mana.

‘Oh.’

“What… are you doing?”

When I turned my head, I saw Jung Ha-Yan reaching out toward Park Deok-Gu. I guess she succeeded in unlocking a legendary-ranked attribute because the amount of mana I was feeling was beyond my imagination. I couldn’t help but gulp when I felt the enormous amount of mana. Jung Ha-Yan wasn’t using ordinary magic to oppress him. I wasn’t sure what kind of spell she was using, but the ground Park Deok-Gu was standing on started to crack as it gradually opened up into a hole. He was enduring her magic while trembling, but I guess he couldn’t resist the pressure of her magic boring down on him. When he laid flat on the ground like a frog, I pitied him.

“*Ugggh… ’*

He was trying to get up, but he couldn’t because having high endurance stats to endure attacks was different from moving while enduring the pressure of a magic spell. Since his strength and magic stats were low, resisting that unknown magic was impossible. I knew Jung Ha-Yan was sensitive about my safety, but I had never imagined that she would act like this toward Park Deok-Gu.

“Apologize…” Jung Ha-Yan ordered.

“*Heuuuk!”*

“Apologize!” she screamed.

Craaaaaack!

“*Ugh!*”

When Jung Ha-Yan increased the spell’s intensity, Park Deok-Gu started to get buried into the ground even more. I was worried that she might actually hurt him, so I had no choice but to stop her. Even though he was pretty strong, I was sure that directly receiving that spell would leave some scars, at the least.

“Jung Ha-Yan, stop,” I ordered.

“*Ah*…”

“I didn’t get hurt and he didn’t do it on purpose,” I added.

“I-I’m sorry…” she stuttered.

“Apologize to Deok-Gu later,” I told her.

“…”

When Jung Ha-Yan lowered her hand, the pressure slowly disappeared, and just the disappearance of the mana boring down on this place made it easier to breathe. I guess 45 points in magic wasn’t enough to endure Jung Ha-Yan’s magic.

When I walked toward Park Deok-Gu, I saw him quietly getting up from the ground so naturally, I extended my hand out. I used Mind’s Eye to see if he had gotten hurt, but he didn’t have any serious injuries.

It seemed like he had some minor internal injuries from overexerting his magic to try and resist Jung Ha-Yan’s magic, but they were injuries he could recover on his own. There were traces on his body that showed he had been trying his best to resist her.

I waited for him to grab my hand, but the pig didn’t look so good. A terrible defeat was written all over his face.

‘Ah… ’

I had to acknowledge the fact that the situation had gotten worse, and it would make even more sense under the assumption that Park Deok-Gu really had an inferiority complex. He must have somewhat realized the gap between himself and Kim Hyun-Sung’s party through Kim Ye-Ri, but this incident should strengthen that notion even more.

‘At my current state, even I… ’

Even I couldn’t catch up to a party of talented monsters. As a non-combatant, I was trying my best to keep up, but even from my point of view, the people around me

were like monsters and because Park Deok-Gu had actually fought on the battlefield with them, I was sure he felt even more desperate than me.

In the end, he didn't grab my hand. He felt defeated from being unable to escape from Jung Ha-Yan's magic, so he got up and started walking out of the nest quietly.

"I-I'm sorry about that, hyung-nim…" Park Deok-Gu apologized.

"It's fine. You just seemed a bit worked up. I'm sorry too, Deok-Gu. I think I had been a bit hasty… Let's talk about this later and take our time," I suggested.

"No, you didn't do anything wrong, hyung-nim," he said.

I couldn't stop him as he slowly walked away.

'How annoying… '

I wanted to be straightforward and tell him to just shut up and take it because he was at his limit and if this continued, the gap between him and the other members would only get bigger. But after considering his feelings, I couldn't tell him that.

Jung Ha-Yan must have realized that she had made a mistake because she was quietly reading my expression and Dialugia looked like she was trying to figure out what was going on from afar. I also wanted to know exactly why the situation had suddenly turned out this way, as this wasn't the situation I had imagined.

'Shit, it's really frustrating… '

I thought maybe he was having some ridiculous thoughts like, *'power obtained through someone else isn't my power,'* but no matter what he was thinking, I was undeniably worried about him.

In the end, I couldn't help but start walking.

"I'm going to visit the guild," I announced.

"Okay… oppa…" Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

It didn't matter whether I was going to visit Park Deok-Gu or Kim Hyun-Sung, I had to come up with another solution.

'This will really be the last time that I'll take care of him.'

As I made my way to the Blue Guild, I made a promise to myself that after helping him increase his stats just this once, I wouldn't hold his hands again if he fell behind. I didn't ride Whitefall, as I wanted to check Park Deok-Gu's condition. If I rode my griffon and announced that I had arrived, he might lock himself up in his room.

Since the guild wasn't far from the nest, it didn't take me long to arrive. He looked like he was going to drink to his heart's content at the underground pub, so I thought maybe that was what he was doing, but he probably wasn't there. I thought maybe he was at the same place where he had trained with Kim Ye-Ri. When I arrived at the spot where Jung Ha-Yan and I had spied on Park Deok-Gu, I saw him and Kim Ye-Ri. It seemed like Park Deok-Gu hadn't noticed my presence, but Kim Ye-Ri must have seen me because she surreptitiously rolled her eyes and quietly looked at me. When I saw that she didn't snitch on me, I was sure that she must have somewhat realized our situation.

Kim Ye-Ri turned her attention away from me and started talking to Park Deok-Gu. I immediately heard him replying to her.

"Your expression. Doesn't look good, mister. Forceful training. Isn't. That effective. You need to rest, too," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"No, I'm not here to train today," he told her.

"Then what is it?" she asked.

"Sparring," he replied.

"That's what we do everyday. That's training." She pointed out.

"No, not that," he said.

"Then what?" she asked.

"I'm asking you to fight as if we're in an actual battle," he answered.

"Are you telling me not to hold back? You're going to get hurt, mister." She pointed out.

“It’s fine,” he replied.

Park Deok-Gu looked anxious. I guess the fact that he had been helpless against Jung Ha-Yan must have really shocked him. Considering that, I thought that he must have finally realized his current status.

Instead of answering him, Kim Ye-Ri discreetly looked at me and it was as if she was asking me if it was okay to not hold back. I wasn’t sure why she was asking for my opinion, but I nodded slightly, as he needed to know exactly what his current status was.

Park Deok-Gu got into his stance and Kim Ye-Ri immediately charged at him.

‘Kim Hyun-Sung?’

I immediately realized who she considered her role model in close combat. Kim Hyun-Sung’s steps were a bit lighter and stylish, but I could see his shadow from some of her movements. I guess he must have influenced her a lot.

Park Deok-Gu straightened his sword as if he was surprised, but Kim Ye-Ri was already close to him and blood instantly splattered nearby.

I somewhat felt it when we fought against Cha Hee-Ra, but the kid’s combat skills were almost equal to Jo Hye-Jin’s.

Park Deok-Gu was getting pushed back to the point that it was embarrassing to even call this a fight, and it broke my heart. He was enduring it with his innate endurance stats, but he could neither attack nor block Kim Ye-Ri. However, it wasn’t that Park Deok-Gu was weak…

‘The kid’s just a monster.’

It seemed like she already knew how he was going to move, so she was moving half a step faster than Park Deok-Gu. After moving far from him, she threw daggers that landed on his body, and then she started attacking him all over his body with her dagger. It was ridiculous how fast Park Deok-Gu was instantly covered in blood. Now, I understood why she had never considered him as her opponent.

“I want to stop,” Kim Ye-Ri suddenly said.

“What?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“No more. If you keep going. It’ll be dangerous. I’ll call for a priest,” she suggested.

“A little more… *huff… puff*…” he mumbled.

“I don’t want to. I don’t understand. I don’t understand why you’re trying to fight me,” she said.

“…”

“Your job isn’t to fight me. Do you. Agree?” she asked.

“…”

“You won’t be like Miss Jo Hye-Jin or Hyun-Sung oppa anyway, so just accept it,” she added.

The kid quietly looked at him before turning around. She must have left to call a priest.

Park Deok-Gu sat on the ground and buried his head between his legs. I watched him, thinking that he was going to immediately get up and start swinging his sword, but he didn’t do that. Instead, I heard him sob quietly.

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